

Nurit Shahari's Loneliness

(Drama)

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TO A LOVE UNFORGOTTEN, AND TO SARAH, WHO ONCE SAVED MY LIFE

*Time and Place:
Palestine/Israel in the mid-nineties.*

Dramatis Personae:

<i>Sfardim:</i>	<i>Ashkenazim:</i>	<i>Falasha:</i>	<i>Palestinians:</i>
<i>Nurit</i>	<i>Rosenbaum</i>	<i>Hefziba</i>	<i>Gamal</i>
<i>Nurit's Mother</i>	<i>Waitress</i>	<i>Yemane</i>	<i>Abu Fathi</i>
<i>Nurit's Father</i>	<i>The Mask =</i>		<i>Aysha</i>
<i>1st Shin Bet Officer</i>	<i>Voice 3rd Shin Bet</i>		<i>Shadi</i>
<i>= 1st Brother</i>	<i>Officer</i>		<i>Aunt Khalida</i>
<i>= Settler</i>			<i>Fathi</i>
<i>2nd Shin Bet Officer</i>			
<i>= 2nd Brother</i>			
<i>= Military Judge</i>			

*Extras:
People of the Village,
Speakers (Prologue)*

I.

Prologue.

The closed curtain is illuminated by a kaleidoscope of lights in shrill colours from behind the stage. As the scene progresses, these form increasingly complex patterns in ever new combinations, from the explosive to the harmonic, in accordance to the patterns of the spoken text.

When Nurit appears, these patterns will have become very dense and the lights will have reached their greatest intensity, so the parting of the curtain at her second or third sentence will create the impression of a womb opening at birth.

Voice Display Izhak Rabin: Ani ma'amin she shte ha 'amim yekholim lihiyot be yahad ba shalom...

Voice Over in the manner of simultaneous translator: I believe that both peoples can live together in peace...

Voice Over Anti-government demonstration in Jerusalem, choir: Mavet la 'Aravim! Mavet la 'Aravim!

Voice Over Simultaneous Translator: Death to the Arabs! Death to the Arabs!

Voice Over Arab Israeli Citizen: Shu salam? Man hadhar-r-rajoul? Qatil auladna.

Voice Over Simultaneous Translator: What peace? Who is this man? The murderer of our children.

Voice Over Arab Israeli Citizen: They've stepped up their controls and security checks since the peace negotiations started. They've never been as heavy-handed as now. It's a peace that leaves no doubt who is who.

Voice Over Woman from Gaza: We are hungry and we've got no clean water. What has changed since the peace accords have been signed? If it's one thing at all, tell me what it is!

Voice Over Hamas Activist: Those who follow the fool of Gaza have opted for their own destruction. The road to what he calls peace leads straight into the water. And we can't swim. Swimming is what you should learn before plunging into the water head-first. But he doesn't care. He's going to make history. And we are going to drown in it.

Voice Over Jewish Settler: Heathens whose souls are the mere wind of life, like those of animals or plants,- Rabin is selling out the Holy Land to them! He sells us! He is selling us! Selling!

Voice Over Anti-Government Demonstration: Izhak Rabin Rotzeah!

Voice Over Simultaneous Translator: Izhak Rabin is a murderer!

Voice Over Rabin: Ani ma'amin...-- (*thoughtfully*) Ma, be emet, ma'amin ani?

Voice Over Simultaneous Translator: What, really, do I believe?

A shoot rings out. A thousand voices break out into a scream.

Voice Over Israeli Citizens: Shalom Haver!

Voice Over Yigal Amir: It had to be done.

Voice Over Shin Bet Officer: Who was the one in charge?

Voice Over Second Shin Bet Officer: Wake up, general! It is time to act.

Voice Over Third Shin Bet Officer: Make the best of the worst. It is time to throw in some weight again and get rid of some trouble-makers, to straighten out some creases and make peace on our own terms, to curtail certain liberties before it comes to the worst.

Voice Over Radio Reporter: The nation is crying.

Song Display Ester Ofarim: Ve as hu haya bahir ve kavoha ke semer...

Voice over Simultaneous Translator: And in those days he was radiant and high as the wheat...

Voice Over Simultaneous Translator, now commenting by himself: Wain as-Salam? Efo ha Shalom? Where is peace? And who ever wanted it?

ENTER NURIT SHAHARI.

When the curtain is lifted, the stage set shows a projection of heaven and sea as a painting or a visual image.

Nurit is a girl of 19-20, a student at Haifa's Carmelia.

The wind plays with her hair as she is speaking.

Nurit: If one would ask me who I am, I'd say this: I'm Nurit Shahari of Haifa, a grain of earth from the earth of this land. The heaven is part of me and also the sea. A bit future, a bit past. That is me. And it rhymes!

Ani Marokait; that's what we say. I'm of Moroccan Jewish stock, born in Israel. It's here that I grew up and it's here I went to school. I've learnt this country's songs and I'm part of her sweetness and a part of her bitterness too.

My parents came here in the fifties. They're Moroccan Jews and one can't talk with them.

Peculiar to think that their blood runs in my veins. Because I-- I spend my nights watching the stars. I'd like to be as lightful as they are and as boundless.

You'll laugh, of course. But you shouldn't. I get called an intellectual, a romantic and a dreamer, and this is why I'm standing here talking to you of these things, though I can't see why. One should keep one's thoughts to oneself. But I'm not ashamed of them.

Our world is cold, and its coldness is burning us. It covers up so much passion. We all walk around in uniforms in order to believe in our existence. And it seems to me that it's the uniforms alone that make our world real.

We mustn't be sentimental here.

And let me tell you one more thing: yesterday Lior spoke to me of his feelings, and these feelings involved me. So I looked into his eyes and I said: "Isn't it time you gave your flat a thorough cleaning?" He said: "What?" And I: "It shall soon be spring."

He's a marvellous boy, to be sure, and nothing could leave me more indifferent than his affection. He's got green eyes, which is so rare in boys, and he truly means nothing to me.

"Do you actually realise all this emptiness around us?" "No", says he, with the bleak look of a green-eyed sheep: "All I realise is the emptiness in your heart."

"I too", said I, "I'm realising it. Mine is a heart as big and as empty as life."

CURTAIN.

1st Scene

"IT'S ALL ONE BIG EMPTY TALK" or "THERE IS RAIN OUTSIDE"

Nurit with her mother in the living room.

It's a typical Israeli apartment, compact but comfortable.

Nurit gets up, rather suddenly. Her mother looks at her.

Mother: Where are you going, Nurit?

Nurit: Don't know.

Mother: You're getting up like this, like one who has a stew on the fire, and you're going off-- without knowing where to?

Nurit: Yes.

Mother: But that's odd.

Nurit: Yes, it's odd.

Nurit leaves the room.

Mother (to the audience): And now look at this girl! I brought her up and provided her with food for 19 years but I don't know her anymore. She used to be a nice girl once. But

I'm starting to worry about her. It's her condition. It's that absent-mindedness. She's got that kind of dreaminess which is so very dangerous. It's too strong in her, wallahi'l 'azim. Honestly. Of course, no ill should be spoken of dreams. We all were dreamers when we came to this country.

(As her monologue continues, the spotlights focus on her and change colour, leaving the rest of the stage in semi-darkness. Behind her runs a transcript of the monologue in huge letters.)

Me, Sarah, I came down from Morocco. This happened because my father -'alav ha shalom- was a dreamer too, in those days. So well, ya 'shabi, the streak may well run in our blood. *(to soft music display in the background)* "If the sea were of milk and the ships thereon were of cinnamon, I should be a fisherman catching pain in the net of his promises of love, a merchant who travels the earth to ask where love begins..." Is that not what our songs say?

Him, he came. He saw. He died. My mother followed him to the world-to-come to be the cushion on which to rest his head. She missed her old home. She missed its noises, its streets, its smells; mint, sweat, perfume and roses. She'd have stayed but what can a woman say... And now this is what we got. The longing died down, the dreams and the yearnings. And what remained were we.

Myself -no evil eye!- I've got my life and I've made myself at home in it. What shall I say--- I came here as a young girl. Milk and honey didn't flow for us. For none of us here. Never. "Us" is us and it's we; my father, my mother and their six surviving children. I was the oldest of them. The other ones then were still below 13.

My father believed in this country and in the happiness it would give us. He was a man of some standing in his quarter back there. The only thing missing was a promised land to call his own. He wanted a place to call home without reservations, and its promise to him was a promise of wealth and success.

Everything, when he came here, was new to him and strange. Well, things were different, of course. Here, he was nameless; one in a multitude of immigrants from the East, a grain of sand among grains of sand in the desert. And that's what he counted for. He who came to be on the top found himself at the bottom. The elite were those with European names to their credit, the Goldmans and Rosenbaums, the "vus-vus"-speaking people, the Ashkenazim with their university diplomas and fat foreign accounts, who were Westerners and looked down upon the Oriental Jew, to whom they allotted the role of unskilled worker, and that was that. They had the state in their pocket. What did they care about us? Extras we were, demographic figures, ya s'habi, patronised by Ben Gurion. And that's what they imported us for.

Bygones. Long ago. Long ago.

My brother Ya'ir gave his life for this country. He died in the Six-Days-War that has given us Jerusalem; Jerusalem of Gold. He was an officer in the army. That was where people like us went to become somebody. And somebodies they became, more often than not martyred somebodies. But that's all bygones, as I said. It happened long ago.

Today their blood is an indigenous part of this earth, and their lost smiles reside in the sweetness of her fruits, Ya'ir's and all the others'.

My younger brother is missing since '83. That was Lebanon.

My sisters are all married and live for their children and families.

Yes, my land of milk and honey, we all have given you your due and we're busy with life

till the next war. And then again we shall do our duty, for family and society, and for you, Israel, the land of our own.
There's nothing much to say about me, after all.

Nurit has returned. Coming into view during the last sentences she watches her mother with interest.

Mother (to Nurit): What about you?

Nurit: What about me?

Mother: What a dialogue!

Nurit: There's rain outside.

Mother (in resignation, seeing that the dialogue with her daughter proves impossible):
Barukh Ha-Shem.

The telephone rings. Nurit goes to receive the call.

Nurit (picking up the receiver): Shahari. -Shalom, Tikva!- -Well enough. And you? The same, I take it. Am I wrong?- -I'm never wrong, you see.- -No, I didn't see him. No.-
-There's rain outside, you see that?- -I don't think. I'm busy. I have to learn for my---
-Okay, tov. Beseder. Bye. *(She hangs up.)*

Mother: That was Tikva.

Nurit: I know.

Mother: Sarcasm doesn't befit a young girl. Your answers are not right. And I'm tired of that, daughter. Still, it's my house where you live. Can't you, say, show some respect? Or try, at least, and be a bit nicer, as it were?

Nurit: I can. I will. From today. Promise.

Mother: What did she want?

Nurit: Who?

Mother: Who?!?

Nurit: Who?

Mother: Well, Tikva.

Nurit: Well..., nothing. What could she have wanted? You know her.

Mother: So it's nothing she called for.

Nurit: It's all one big empty talk.

Mother: I wonder, ya binti hayyati, why it is that I can't get any hold on you. I simply can't touch you. I consequently fail when I try. I want to say something. I want to talk to you. Or even *with* you. But whenever I try to, my words poor down on you like rain. They don't stick. They don't get through. Like you're wearing a rain coat. When you were, you know, the age they say is difficult to handle, you didn't give me troubles at all. I expected them then. But now you start. And it takes me by surprise.

Nurit: Sorry for that.

Mother: That is not what I mean. --Your father is keeping very long today.--- Say something now!

Nurit: There is rain outside.

Mother: I know.

We hear the noise of a door being opened from outside. A few seconds later Nurit's father enters the room. He is wet.

ENTER NURIT'S FATHER.

Father: Erev tov! How are you both?

Mother: Barukh Ha-Shem! And you too, habibi, how are you?

Father (answers the enquiry with a confirmative gesture of his head, then says after a short pause): It is raining.

Nurit: Really?

Father (pointing at his wet hair etc.): Well, somehow I am under the impression it is.

Mother: You are late.

Father: There was some trouble with Aharoni, as usual. That's what is keeping me. It is that, all the time. Him. The idiot who knows everything.

Nurit: Don't mind him. It's the human condition.

Father: If you say so.

Mother: Look at this remark! That's what she is like these days.

Father: Forget about the remark. It is only her period. I thought you'd have noticed that.

Mother: Are you hungry?

Nurit: It's not any period of mine. It's me.

Father: All right. It's you, then. Don't let that worry you, all the same. Your mother, when she has her period, is like that too. That's why in our prayers we thank God for not having created us women.

Mother: Me?!

Father (to Nurit): But she has learnt to cover it up. Or she has learnt to live with it or what do I know. You'll learn that as well, as time goes on. Or else, you'll end up like Aharoni. They're always two possibilities, of course. In men, it starts with promotions, develops into head aches and gastric ulcers and ends in the Aharonitic disposition. And may God the Merciful preserve us, lest it may happen unto us too!

Nurit (laughing): You're hitting the nail on the head.

Mother: And you've spoilt my appetite with your talk of gastric ulcers. And period talk. And indecent remarks! No evil eye, please God!

Nurit: Anyway, I've got to...- you know. The exams. *(wants to go)*

Father: Won't my sweetheart eat with us first?

Nurit: Sweetheart will eat later.

Father: Aye, neshama.

EXIT NURIT.

Father: Isn't she adorable? Your daughter.

Mother: Let me serve you your food.

(She makes to leave for the kitchen.)

Father: Sarah!

Mother (turning back): Yes?

Father: Be a good wife and get me a pill to drown the headache!

CURTAIN.

2nd Scene

“WE ALL ARE CREATURES OF THE OCCUPATION”

Haifa. Khalisa.

Abu Fathi in his living room.

He is a middle-aged man who smokes a lot.

A cigarette in his hand, he is sitting on a chair as the door bell is ringing.

He goes to open.

The spotlights focus on the smoke rising from his cigarette which he has put down in an ash tray while we hear him receive his guest in the corridor. Above the ash tray, on the wall, hangs a photo of the Al Aqsa Mosque. The cigarette smoke underneath ascends to it like incense from an altar.

After a few seconds Abu Fathi returns into the living room with his guest, a man aged 21 - 22.

Abu Fathi: Ahlan bik, ya Gamal, ahlan wa sahlani! T’faddal! *(motions Gamal to one of the seats.)*

(Gamal and Abu Fathi sit down.)

Abu Fathi: You smoke?

Gamal: No, thank you.

Abu Fathi: You haven’t honoured this place with your visit for a long time... How is your family?

Gamal: Al hamdu li’llah.

Abu Fathi: How is everyone?

Gamal: Al hamdu li’llah. They’re all fine, truly.

Abu Fathi: Al hamdu li’llah. So all the matters are well?

Gamal: Ah, with Allah's help, they're well enough.

Abu Fathi: Good. *(smiles)* And yourself?

Gamal: Well, well, good enough too, thank you, ya Abu Fathi.

(We hear the door being opened.)

Abu Fathi: It's Aysha.

ENTER AYSHA.

She is a beautiful dark-skinned girl about 15-16 years of age.

As she is back from the market, she carries one bag in her right and two in her left and moves with the air of someone purposefully going about domestic business.

Aysha: As-Salamu 'alaikum!

Gamal and Abu Fathi: Wa 'alaikum as-salam war-rahmatu'llah!

Abu Fathi (to Aysha): Go and prepare some coffee for us, hayyati. And bring some snacks for our guest.

Gamal: Oh, thank you. Some coffee will do. I wouldn't take any food right now.

Abu Fathi: Have some snacks, Gamal, why would you want to starve!?

Aysha: I did some nice cake this morning. You can't leave this house without having tried it.

Gamal: All right, all right. La haula wa la quwata illa bi'llah.
EXIT AYSHA.

Abu Fathi: She's been trying out some Turkish recipe.

Gamal: Wonderful.

Abu Fathi(nods): Gamal...

Gamal: Na'am?

Abu Fathi: Have you been to Jenin?

Gamal: Not in a long time, no.

Abu Fathi: You know how it is. You know Fathi's business---

Gamal: Is it still as it used to be?

Abu Fathi: Yes. I have no message from him. Since two months. Nothing. I'm...uneasy.

Gamal(nods): Yes.

Abu Fathi: Who can tell what he is getting himself into?! As I'm sitting here day by day without being able to do a thing about it, I'm asking myself all sorts of questions. Those people, when they need you, they use you, and when they have no use for you anymore, they discard you. At one word's notice. He never quite understood what he's let himself in for. And with whom. *(with a painfully controlled start)* Fool that he is, he is still my son! If he were dead by now, I wouldn't know it. He left home. I let him go. He went. Khalas. I wouldn't stand for all that nonsense. He knew. And he chose. What was I supposed to do?! What could I have done?! Still, I wonder whether the question can be answered in such terms. Or asked in these terms at all.

Gamal: A man knows what he does, Abu Fathi. Maybe it is not bad. Who knows? Fathi always believed in his luck. In his ability to outdo everyone; with a trick, with a smile, with an elegant move. We've grown up together. I know the boy he was and I know the man he is now. The flame, in burning him, will make him see- or destroy him. We -- can't do more than hope it will turn out for the better.

Abu Fathi: Was he a bad child? No, he was sweet. He was delightful. Why? Why did he have to grow into that sort of man? Why did things have to turn out that way?

Gamal(bitter): Because Allah wanted it.

Abu Fathi: One loses his father, the other loses his son. That's what life does to you. That's what Palestine is about. "Home" spells like "sorrow" in our days. There is a split in all of us, Gamal, a split that cuts our souls in two. When they conquered this land, they drove a wedge between us, and that's how they conquered us. That wedge is everything. It's the beginning of their rule and their hold on this land, their grasp on the souls and minds of those who inhabit it. They drive it deeper and deeper, and the deeper it cuts, the stronger their power grows. They turn us into illiterates, into people with no roots in their own earth and therefore with no defence, and into smarmy criminals, ya habibi, that crawl in the dirt like insects. Is that what we are? Is that a reflection of our nature? Is it the distortion occupation and alien rule impose on the mind of the pure? Or is the occupation itself a reflection of our nature? Man's dignity is corrupt. He goes after food. Pride is an invention of those who can afford it, obedience to the law the luxury of those who do not need to break it in order to survive. My son wasn't one of them. It is therefore a luxury not given to him.

There has been an Intifada, a struggle that claimed the lives of those who believed in the attainability of freedom, and they have given it willingly. Our lives are our only weapon. To sacrifice them to the sacred cause of a life in which there are choices is the only luxury we can afford. We bathed in it, as we were bathed in our own blood, Gamal-- and

everything ended in silence. We are creatures of the occupation.

Gamal: Yes, there's silence, silence, silence. No answer, that. No answer. As for me, I ought to stop thinking. Else, it's going to ruin me. *(with a short laugh)* Mind, ya 'ammi! Mind is a dangerous gift. There are nights, Abu Fathi, where I catch myself at it: at thinking. There's that poor me lying sleepless with my thoughts circling around the subject -our favourite one, the occupation- and inner and outer Palestine. This helpless thinking, those stagnating realities-- there must be a way out, something in me says. There must be a way out...

Some steal, some go on drugs and get addicted in order to do something, some take up the explosive belt and blow the problem into eternity...---

Abu Fathi: And some study, like you, Gamal, at the Jewish universities. You study history and you ask yourself: Where is our history? And you study law and you ask yourself: Where, in this law, is our right? The right of birth and the history of 2000 years? Where have t h e y been? And now it is "theirs". Not even the language in which you study is your own.

Gamal: Aye, day by day I sit there (in Hebrew) ve ani lomed. I aim my thoughts at words and grasp them, seeking out knowledge in them. And I watch them. The Jews. For half a year now, since the semester has started.

Abu Fathi: And what do you see?

Gamal: Nothing.

Abu Fathi: Take another tea!

Gamal (thoughtful, while Abu Fathi pours the tea into his glass): They eat when they're hungry, and when they are thirsty, they drink. Some of them like eating and some don't, like that girl, Nurit. She always seems far away, lost in ethereal skies, quite ethereal herself. Not from this world, really...

Abu Fathi (with some interest): Who's Nurit? Some Carmelitan flower? Some songbird of nights sweeter than ours?

Gamal: A girl in my semester, a fellow student.

Abu Fathi: O sweet fellow student days! Some of their girls are of remarkable beauty.

Gamal: Mah seh shayakh li? What is their beauty to me? *(softer)* They are cornflowers. And some of them are white-washed little stones by the sea shore. Their beauty often is somewhat austere but always very deep.

Abu Fahti: So what will be, my son Gamal?

Gamal: What do you mean?

Abu Fathi: Some phrase to fill empty space. The future, certain optimistic minds call it.

Gamal: The earth shall circle the sun. This movement shall make night and day and we shall ask ourselves what will be.

Abu Fathi: La haula wa la quwata illa bi'llah. And what did Nurit teach you about the Jews?

Gamal: They're creatures of the occupation.

Abu Fathi (in mock astonishment): La haula wa la quwata...!

ENTER AYSHA.

She carries a plate with Turkish sweetmeats.

Aysha: Ya nas! Make way! Here goes my Turkish recipe!

Gamal and Abu Fathi laugh. Aysha puts the plate on the table ceremoniously and starts distributing the sweetmeats. She puts the first one in her father's mouth and obviously intends to go on serving the second one to Gamal in the same manner, but stops herself before the act has actually commenced.

Aysha: Well, my brother, I'll leave the choice to you.

Gamal: Don't make me burn my mouth. Or my hand.

Aysha throws him a smile and leaves again.

EXIT AYSHA.

Abu Fathi (thoughtfully): She spent a lot of time shopping this morning... I would appreciate it if you could look after Fathi.

Gamal: Insha' Allah. I will see him. If you want, I can check him out on my way to Jenin next week.

Abu Fathi: Tell him I'm praying for him.

Gamal: Good.

Abu Fathi: Talk to him when there's a chance that he might listen. Tell him not to get himself into any nonsense, you hear? Bring him back! Back to reason, back to--- *(stops short of finishing his sentence.)* Anyway, we'll do what we can.

Gamal: Can a man change another man's way though?

Abu Fathi (nods): Another thing-- Speaking of this girl (*indicating the door through which Aysha has left*)

Gamal: The Turkish Recipe?

Abu Fathi (nods): Once you are going to Jenin next week, you might be so kind as to do me a favour. One more. My sister over there has asked me to send the girl down to look after her for a while. They've taken her husband last week. They don't have children themselves and my daughter is her daughter too. I'd have gone there myself and brought Aysha along but I've been refused the entry permit.

Gamal: Who does the refusals nowadays? The Israeli or the Palestinian authorities?

Abu Fathi: They are done by both sides in mutual agreement. That's how it is done nowadays.

Gamal: What are the circumstances? Do they allow of any guess as to how long he will be kept in prison?

Abu Fathi: The circumstances are the same they have always been, ya Habibi. There's no need to guess. If your tongue is not chained up like a dog that bites, it will carry you to jail straightway. Only now it's Arafat who does the jailing and you're locked up in the name of freedom and autonomy. And your prison ward is now a Palestinian. That's what we've been fighting for, after all. To our brothers in the autonomous areas this has now become reality. There's an achievement for you!

Gamal: That's freedom Palestinian fashion. The occupation has now got an Arabian face.

Abu Fathi: The art of politics, of course, remains an art of travesty.

Gamal: When the occupation is all around us, the Intifada must be in our hearts.

Abu Fathi: Intifada once more? A new one?

Gamal: A true one. An Intifada as true as the occupation. An Intifada as thorough. Our problems are with the realities of the occupation themselves, not with their modus operandi. That should determine our response.

Abu Fathi: There's some revolutionary blood in your veins!

Gamal: There are thoughts in my mind. The future of Palestine, they tell me, is the future of you and me. The future of her people, which a name and a map and a flag shall not bring about by themselves, not even a national anthem. If we were to think our own thoughts and go our own way, we wouldn't need Abu Ammar to do it for us. What has

sparked off the Intifada and who started and sustained it? Who is it that takes up a struggle and leads it and wins-- or loses it? The people by themselves and on their own! When they need a symbol, they choose it and when they need an apparatus to organise the struggle, they appoint it, and when it has outlived its usefulness, they discard it. That is all I know.

Abu Fathi: And thus, the symbol discarded and the apparatus outlived, goes in search of new alliances, or? Of new meanings to assume? Hence, we must eat our Turkish sweets as long as they're hot. *(He takes one. Gamal does likewise.)*

Gamal: You are a generous host, and your daughter is true to her Turkish delights. I believe the favour I have the honour to do you concerns her and your sister?

Abu Fathi: As I can't go myself to see her off to her aunt, I wish you could see to that. I want her to get enrolled at the local school.

Gamal: Insha'Allah. I shall be here on Saturday morning.

Abu Fathi: Good.

Gamal: It is time for me to go, with your permission. I have come to ask of your health. May Allah bless you for the hospitality you have shown me.

Abu Fathi: Allah y'khalik!

Both men get up from their seats and move toward the door.

Gamal: Ma'asalameh!

Abu Fathi (as they go): Ma'salameh ya ibni, ma'asalameh. Allah ma'ak!

EXIT GAMAL AND ABU FATHI.

CURTAIN.

3rd Scene

“IT’S ECONOMICS THAT IS AT THE CORE OF THE PROBLEM”

Jenin.

Gamal and Aysha.

They have arrived at the house of Aysha's aunt.

It is a small, provisional type of house built without permit.

Aysha's aunt is absent.

Hence, Gamal and Aysha are waiting for her in front of the house, squatting on the pavement.

Gamal: Surely she's gone to visit her husband. Does she know you're coming?

Aysha: I don't know.

Gamal: Well, let's presume she does. *(as Aysha remains silent)* What now?!--- If they refuse to let her see him or they just keep her waiting or decide to keep her there altogether...then we may still be sitting here by the end of next week. They play their games with the visiting permits. That's all part of it. Just as the Israelis did before--- Why did your father not inform her? Ah, well, he must have. There's no way he didn't... We could do something useful to beat the time and see you to the school so you can enrol there in the meantime. Which one is it?

Aysha: I don't know.

Gamal: Excuse me...?

Aysha: Gamal...

Gamal: Na'am?

Aysha: It's not as...the situation, you see, is not what you take it for. Can I trust you?

Gamal: That's a good question.

Aysha: I want to tell you what is happening. But I'm not sure whether I can trust you.

Gamal: Your father does, obviously.

Aysha: Exactly.

Gamal: I felt there's something wrong here. I felt it all along...

Aysha: It's not wrong but...different. I wish I could trust you...

Gamal: Tayyib. Allahu akbar. Trust me, then!

Aysha: You know, of course, why my father wants me to stay here?

Gamal: No.

Aysha: (after some hesitation) He has told you, of course. But there is another reason behind his reason.

Gamal: That is between you and your father.

Aysa (really wanting to talk): Brother Gamal, I wish to confide in you in a matter that needs some thought. There are times in life when you need to seek the council of a reliable person. It is not an easy decision to take. I'm placing my future, my life perhaps, into your hands...if I do.

Gamal: I don't envy you for having to make such a decision.

Aysa: Life, in this society, is not easy for a girl.

Gamal: Life, in this society, isn't easy for anyone. However, if there is something you have to tell me, I shan't report it to the police, neither to the Israeli nor to the Palestinian "autonomous" one.

Aysa: What is your idea of love?

Gamal: Love is a bird in the skies. It flaunts many colours. If you catch it, it won't let you go.

Aysa: Do you believe love is something real?

Gamal: I'm not at all sure l i f e is something real. But tell me, if you please, what is it that is setting off all these questions?

Aysa: I want to be a good muslima. This is what I want to be first, before anything else. I want to do what is right, what seems right, what must be right... I want to be a good daughter to my father...

Gamal: Al hamdu li'llah.

Aysa: But life--- Brother Gamal, life--- is not always a straight path. Allah has appointed to each of us his own fate.

Gamal: "...Lo, every soul, WE have set over it a guardian..." (Surat At-Tariq)

Aysa: I believe that love is a great gift and a sacred power. It is a way opened up to us so we may recognise ourselves with the aid of a knowledge of things we have been unaware of before.

Gamal: It seems you're working on a book about love.

Aysa: Perhaps I a m that book. Perhaps my life is *(adding on second thought, as a correction to mitigate the impact of the statement)* -- meant to be.

Gamal: Maskina! You've caught the bird, have you?

Aysa: I am that bird and the sky it travels. I am its flight too.

Gamal: Love is like headache, little sister. If you don't mind it too much, it goes away.

Aysa: Is that the way men love?

Gamal gives a short laugh, half bitter, half startled.

Aysa: My father thinks like that, too.

Gamal: Have you...brought up the topic with him?

Aysa: He's against the marriage. He thinks preventing me from seeing him will prevent my heart from remembering his.

Gamal: But, of course, it won't?

Aysa: Allah knows it won't.

Gamal: Who is he?

Aysa: His name is Shadi.

Gamal: T h a t Shadi? Mu'amar's son?

Aysa: No, you don't know him. He's a man from Fardis.

Gamal: Then, at least, he's not from Khalisa. Is he a Muslim?

Aysa: Do you know any Christians in Fardis?

Gamal: Well, Fardis... Does he have any work over there?

Aysa: He stays in Haifa. He works as a teacher.

Gamal: And how do you know him, if I may ask?

Aysa: He used to give me lessons.

Gamal: Ya haram! In what?

Aysa: He's a friend of my father's. It was he who engaged him.

Gamal: Is he the originator of your Turkish recipes?

Aysha: He prepared me for the exam. It's my maths and my English... He still should be doing that if not...--

Gamal: Thank God it came out in time, little sister. The current of the river is strong. There's no one who drowns by their own will. Yet, people drown.

Aysha: No, brother Gamal. By Allah, no. He is a man who knows what he wants and I too know it.

Gamal: So what is it he wants, Aysha?

Aysha: It is me. It is life. It is love. I'm that to him. He is to me. I too know what I want. That's what I'm saying.

Gamal: And what you want is him. He's life to you. And love. What did Abu Fathi say? Just no?

Aysha: He didn't say that. He didn't say no bluntly. But he makes it impossible.

Gamal: How?

Aysha: The bride price.

Gamal: Ah, that's where love meets its limit. If it's not the sky, it's the bride price, hayyati. How much does he ask?

Aysha: 30.000 Shekel.

Gamal: Your security. Your future. Not an unreasonable amount. The usual thing, in fact.

Aysha: We can't raise it.

Gamal: We? So much do you love him that you'd be willing to pay your own bride price if you could?

Aysha: Why do you ask me this? If I could... well, does it matter who puts the stones out of the way? He works as a teacher by day and by night and on week-ends he works as a lorry driver. He's the only one in his family. He's their breadwinner. The money he brings home is the money the family lives on.

Gamal: I know that. He's not the only one.

Aysha: He can't raise 30.000 Shekel in a hundred years if this is to continue the way it goes. And there's no indication it shall ever be different. Just b e c a u s e he's not the

only one. Just because it's the usual state of affairs. There's no hope.

Gamal: How old is he?

Aysha: Twenty two.

Gamal: He should have known better than bring upon himself a marriage he can't pay for.

Aysha: But why should it all come down to money?

Gamal: Didn't your father tell you? Because should he leave you and your father should no longer be alive to support you by that time, it would be the end of your life. But with 30.000 Shekel in your hand the situation would look a bit less bleak than without.

Aysha: "Should he leave me...?"

Gamal: It's not possible, eh?

Aysha: It's not about him leaving me. It's about sharing my life, my hope, my dreams, my heaven and its stars with the man that is my fate, soul of my soul and a stronghold in the tides of a life I wouldn't know how to bear without him; in wealth and in poverty, in sorrow and happiness, in darkness as in light. My love, my friend, my haven, my self. You understand me, Gamal? You do. Underneath all your bitterness, you do. There's a heart in you, and I have known it too well to be deceived.

Gamal: There's a heart somewhere in me, yes. A mind as lucid as yours will not fail to realise that. Science claims it is beneath my left breast. It might be true, for that's where I feel it sometimes. Disturbing little thing that it is. Yes, Aysha, I understand you. Too well. Too well I do understand you. But you're an Arab girl in an Arab society. And it's not even that. What I have to tell you is: ideal values are ideal values. But food is an important thing. A man is the provider of his family. A girl is never safe without a valuable dowry in the background. Your father is giving you the chance of getting a proper, solid education. You want to throw it away for a marriage he doesn't approve of.

Aysha: You sound like my father. He can be proud of you.

Gamal: Don't misunderstand me, Aysha! All I want is to remind you how society works. I want you to understand his reasoning. These things do not happen out of cruelty. I've known your father for a long time, as you'll be aware, and perhaps I know him quite well. He's a thoughtful person and a man with a generous mind, not someone who'd take a decision without knowing why. Don't accuse him of attempting to destroy your life. He is trying to preserve it.

Aysha: We, too, haven't taken our decision thoughtlessly. We, too, know why. And how. My marriage does not mean I'm going to give up my education. He's a teacher himself

and he knows what it means. You can't preserve the life of a bird by cutting off her wings. They're her soul. Cut it off, and you're taking her life away.

Gamal: Wait, my sister, one minute! You know why and h o w ?

Aysha, sulkily, remains silent.

Gamal: Aysha, listen! I've grown up with you. I know you as I would know my sister. You're a girl with a brilliant mind and you are, to me, a sister indeed. Unfortunately, mind is not the only thing a girl has got. As my sister, I wouldn't advise you wrongly, and I wouldn't want to see you commit a mistake you can't ever correct. Trust your father's reason and allow your heart to question itself this one time. Words and promises are easily given. There isn't a man in the world who wouldn't promise you whatever you ask him. But once you're in his hand, how will you compel him to honour his promise? He can't pay the bride price. How will he pay for your education? What if he loses his work?

Be patient and don't run into your own disaster! You said yourself above all you want to be a good daughter to your father, a good Muslima...Sister... --!

Aysha: But where is in the Qur'an is the chapter that says a man has to pay 30.000 Shekel to the father of his bride? Does it not rather say a woman is free to relieve him of the burden of the dowry if she so desires?

Gamal: Habibti, this isn't about the Qur'an but about the circumstances of life as we find it.

Aysha: Are we mere slaves of circumstances as we find them? Where are w e ? Where is our mind that allows us to make choices? And where is our free will, our creative power, that allows us to carry them out? Are we the only people on earth? Are our ways the only ways possible? Take the Jews: they are living their lives the way they think right. When they talk about marriage, they don't talk about money. But...about...love?

Gamal: Go to Me'ah She'arim and see what they talk about when they talk about marriage!

Aysha: I don't mean Me'ah She'arim. I mean Hilonim. I mean people around here. I mean westernised people. Those who run this country.

Gamal: Well, those that run this country, is it money that is their problem? If they do the job your Shadi does, they earn twice the wages he earns. This state is made for them and they receive what it has to give. To some it may be more, to some it may be less. But you and I and Shadi, where do we fit in in this brotherhood? Where do we stand in this system? You know where. It's economics that is at the core of the problem.

Aysha: I understand what you mean. You are right. Also my father is right. He is right from his point of view. But we, too, are right.

Gamal: From your point of view?

Aysha: Yes.

Gamal: Certainly. It's not I who has to solve this.

Aysha: Whatever the case be, we've taken our decision.

Gamal: What, in other words, would that mean?

Aysha: I have confided in you in a sensitive matter. I've told you all there is to be said.

Gamal gives her a bleak stare.

Aysha: My aunt ---

Gamal: Don't tell me you're all together in this!? What are you planning?

Aysha: You will have all the explanations later. For now... my brother... Gamal, tell my father that you've handed me over to her and she asks you to extend to him her greetings! You leave me here. I'm taken care of. I told you we know what we do, and we're not alone in this. Trust me to be who you know me to be. And to remain it. Only this. It's not much I'm asking.

Gamal: Impossible.

Aysha: It's the best for all of us.

Gamal: It's my word and my honour, nothing less! I've told your father I would see you off to your aunt's and make sure you get there safely and sound. That's all. If you have any differences with him, go back to him and tell him your mind. But I would advise you: Accept it! This is a matter I don't want to get involved in. Point blank. I'm not going to leave you to any ill-conceived plans you may have concocted.

Aysha: Your honour! That's all that matters to you? Do you know what you are sacrificing for it?

Gamal: Do you know what y o u are sacrificing?

Aysha: I know it. Allah knows I do. But consider this too: *(with spotlights on her)*
Love,
when it goes beyond the scope of illusion,
destroys illusions and makes reality plain.
A dream you leave behind leaves you scarred or leaves you unscarred
but the dream you follow

becomes a physical force
fit to change you and your world within and without
when,
born of realities and directing its power at them,
it becomes, in itself, reality,
renewed.

*Her last word coincides with the appearance of Fathi. He is moving towards the house.
Gamal and Aysha are watching him, recognising him as he comes closer.*

ENTER FATHI.

Aysha: Fathi!

Fathi: Ahlan, Aysha, ahlan! Gamal! Kief? Ahlan! Ahlan bik! What's the wind that blew you here?

Gamal: I came here to see you.

Fathi (broad): To see me? Wonderful! And you have seen me.

Aysha: How are you?

Fathi: Wonderful.

Gamal: Your father worries himself about you a lot.

Fathi (laughs): My father? Yes, of course, the poor guy.

Aysha: It is true what Gamal says. Our father has sent him to look for you, since we haven't had any news from you in two months.

Fathi: You don't worry! Life is delicious. I'm fine. I'm having fun here and I'll be fluent enough in the language of wealth to come and greet you properly. Soon, I tell you, soon. You hear what your brother says, little one? I'm going to send one Mercedes Benz for each of you as a present.

Gamal (having watched him very carefully) : Let me see your eyes!

Fathi: Are you mad?

Gamal (coming closer to him, with one expert look at his pupils): You're mastoul. I see it by the way you're walking. No need to even open your mouth and pour out this speech. You're on drugs.

Fathi: You are a mad man, I swear! Stop talking nonsense! (*grossly imitating him*)

“You’re mastoul” (*abruptly turning to Aysha*) Am I mastoul? You tell me, girl! Am I mastoul? That foolish dog calls me a junkie! (*turning to Gamal*) You are garbage. He begrudges me my success. Who are you at all? (*to Aysha*) Yeah girl, who is he??? Talks to me like from a pulpit! (*back to Gamal*): You are nothing! Nothing and nobody. You are nobody now and you were nobody before. Where is that courage you think you’ve got so much of? Just where is it? Stop talking, brother! The rubbish that comes out of your mouth does not impress me. Do something! I didn’t talk. I went ahead and got myself into business, haven’t I, and now I’m busy achieving! Yes! Achieving is what I say. I have arrived at a point where I can say it was worth it. I can say: I am moving ahead. I can say: Yes, son, it is now you make it! There is light at the end of the tunnel. Life is a bitch and I’m going to have her! You, brother, are dry. There is no flesh on your bones. There isn’t the lightning of an idea in your mind! I don’t want to spend my life the way my father did, listen to me! I don’t want to get stuck and bugged down by this life. A man must try, must go forward. If you want to achieve something you need courage and the preparedness to take a risk. My father believed he could hold me back, tie me to the house like a sick man-- and prevent me from going for it. From moving on. And he believes that till today. I’m not a philosopher, me, but: I know what a man needs. But you’re an ass and the son of an ass. (*laughing*) Anyway, we’re even. I’m the son of an ass as well. But listen to me: (*Gamal restrains Aysha with an authoritative gesture while observing Fathi with interest*) I’ve learnt to take the money from where it is. (*speaking to the audience*) Arab or Jew: what we want is a comfortable life. Making money’s a matter that needs to be understood. Money doesn’t lie on the streets. It grows on no trees either. But there is a market for everything. Arab or Jew-- you know what I want. I know what you want. What one cannot do alone, he must do with someone else. Moneymaking’s the key to mutual understanding. As long as I can get from you what I need and as long as you need me to get what you want, you are my brother and I am your brother and peace and love rule the world. In business there’s no difference between Arab and Jew. There’re two kinds of people only: the winners and the losers, the whole world over: there are only two: the poor and the rich. (*turning his back on Gamal*) You shall see. Soon you’ll receive the car I sent you together with a neat little gallon of fuel, a gift from you to me, you bastard. A token of good luck.

Gamal (unmoved): What business is that that gives you prospects as promising as these? Stealing some cars? Robbing grocery stores? I hope this deal is better than the last one you were in.

Fathi: No, dear. That was bullshit.

Gamal: Agreed.

Fathi: They were using me, the sons of a bitch, as a human sacrifice, as their bleeding proxy in cell.

Gamal: Yes.

Fathi: One must take the money right from where it sits. Right from the place.

Gamal: Don't drive me mad! Say where it sits now! Maybe I'll find some too.

Fathi (spits out): You got to be grateful for the presents you receive. That's all that is asked of you.

Gamal: All right.

Fathi: This world is a dark place. Lo, a place of grief it is and of sorrow. Man's path got crooked. May Allah have mercy! For so revealeth our Lord unto the Angel of the Recitation: "There awaits them a painful chastisement." But until then we forget. Maybe it's all half as terrible, after all. There's a scent in the air that can bring paradise near. The scent of a flower that grows on sunlit fields, heavy and dark and god-like and healing. It gives refuge from fear. Fear! God, there's fear in me! Fear - God!- is my companion. Wherever I go, oh Allah!, there is fear. Forgetting is medicine. It makes you bear the unbearable and suffer what cannot be suffered. I'm forgetting and I help others forget. I sell forgetting. I sell medicine.

Gamal: Opium.

Fathi: Yes, my brother.

Gamal: Ahbal. *(translating the phrase in an aside to the audience):* Idiot.

Fathi: I'm not any small dealer, ya habibi. No! Not Fathi! I'm one of those who organise the sale. Internationally, if you get my meaning. The Arab doesn't shy away from risk and the Jew understands about business. This is the way it goes. We work hand in hand. Ours is a harmonic alliance. The alliance of money-making, each bringing in what he's got. And sometimes some pretty blue-eyed Jewess crosses the divide, right into my arms. It's those who know sugar that know sweetness. But restraint is called upon (*eying Aysha*) in the presence of a girl. Though not in every girl's presence. (*laughs*)

Another man enters the stage. Aysha gives him a sign to go back. But Gamal has already seen him.

ENTER SHADI.

Gamal: Who are you?

Aysha: Shadi.

Gamal: As-Salamu 'alaikum!

Shadi (extends his hand to him, which he takes): Wa 'alaikum as-salam wa-rahmatu'llah. You are Aysha's brother?

Gamal (pointing at Fathi): No, that is Aysha's brother.

Shadi is somewhat confused and does not survey the situation. For a moment he remains silent.

Aysha: This is Gamal. He is a good friend of my father's. He has---

Gamal (cuts her short, to Shadi): I have to talk to you, brother. There are one or two things we shall have to discuss.

Fathi: Bismillah, let's go.

EXIT SHADI AND GAMAL.

Aysha remains alone with her brother.

Fathi: What was that?

Aysha: Gamal will tell you. *(to herself)* Everything is lost.

Fathi: Ah?

Aysha: Nothing, Fathi. Look at yourself! If you could look at yourself with the eyes of another, your life would be different.

Fathi: You're foolish people. Wish I knew what you're talking about.

Aysha (into the void): And if I could see myself with the eyes of another? Would my life be different too? Or would my dream be? Life and dream. How confusing it can be to make out which is which! Or are both one? Fathi left our father's house and Allah alone knows if he shall ever see him again. And I, leaving his house now, wonder: Shall he lose me too? He loses his children. But I shan't go. I can't. The last chance passed me by. I love him, my father, o yes. He's the earth that yields the fruits of which I am one. Uprooted from the earth and from him, what fruits shall I bear? And yet, I can't remain with him.

Fathi: Look at yourself! Talking into empty air. Shedding meaningless words like unclean blood, may God protect us all! Where are you leaving to? When? How? Why can't you stay? Why would you remain?

Aysha: Because love is a palace put up for the beggar. To enter into it, you must abandon everything.

Fathi: Love? Shit! So you're in love? *(Aysha uncomfortably remains silent. After a while Fathi has understood.)* I understand. You're in love and want to do nonsense and our father prevents you. If I were in his place, I would kill you, you whore. You wanted

to run away with that boy. What is your family's honour to you? *(He hits her sharp.)*

Aysha: You're mastoul.

Fathi: Shut up! --- I'm going.

He leaves with a dragging gait, in a foul mood, but too numb to sustain fury for a long time. He waves it aside. Aysha looks up at him but lets him go.

EXIT FATHI.

Gamal returns.

ENTER GAMAL.

Aysha: Fathi has gone.

Gamal: Let him go. I shall see him later.

Aysha: Where is Shadi?

Gamal: Don't ask questions. He'll be back with your aunt and his mother. Insha'Allah I'll be here in three days' time. You wait for them here. I must be on my way.

CURTAIN.

4th Scene

WHAT SEPARATES US IS THE MASKS WE WEAR

An assembly hall on a school or university campus. Surrounded by a group of students or spectators, Gamal and a Falasha Girl, Hefziba, around the same age as himself, are sitting opposite each other on a multi-purpose stage. Hefziba directs her questions to him in the manner of a journalist conducting an interview.

Hefziba: How did you come to know Nurit Shahari?

Gamal: The way a person comes to know another. There are a thousand ways and chances. As for Nurit, well, we were in the same seminar at Carmelia. We knew one another and at the same time we didn't. In the beginning I didn't pay much attention to her. She didn't see me either. It's "Shalom", "Ahlan", "Bye", "How are you?", "How am

I", you name it. A thousand ways to talk without talking. Until one day -I don't remember when and out of what kind of mood or due to what kind of reason- our thoughts met and we started exchanging words, views and what you call ideas.

Hefziba: And as to her thoughts, words, views and what I call ideas, did you understand them? And did she understand yours? In other words, could you relate to them? Or indeed to each other?

Gamal: There's only a certain number of things where one can understand the other. It's a scope wide enough to make communication between people possible and narrow enough to make it worthwhile. I can't follow you to the source of your mind and you can't follow me to mine. A woman is an island to be discovered, step by step, with all the curiosity, with all the caution, sensitivity and perseverance -and with all the fascination- of an explorer who enters a land yet unknown. Every person is a world in themselves, within a universe of their own. A world that has its own dynamic. The motions of their thoughts are like the course of the stars. Ideas and emotions rise up in them to fall like shooting stars. Some are like comets that fleet the orbit of your thoughts in one brief sequence to throw their light against the inner core of your being; cognitions that flare up suddenly, changing everything, sharp and incisive, like electrons flung against a nucleus split it.

History is the space our lives are embedded in. Its course is the plane our fates and our lives and ways circle. And the way in which they move. Every impression has its own power and its own imprint, and often the gleam of one moment, the impact of a fleeting encounter, assumes a might to which we cannot refuse ourselves. It's impressions like these by which our consciousness is formed. They're like seeds planted in our hearts and ripening with time until they have grown and borne the fruit of a new world that comes into being, within ourselves and around us.

You were talking about the understanding of ideas.

Nurit and I came from the opposite ends of the divide. Water and fire, if you please, but I hold this isn't really the truth. An idea can travel from one mind to another when there lies a relevance in it to him or her that absorbs it. An idea is a way, you see, the foundation of a building, like the colouring of a picture; mind energy resulting in comprehension or doubt, a path leading somewhere or nowhere. Let's imagine it as a beam that incides the mirror of consciousness and is reflected by it-- or isn't. It's the amount of truth in it that makes up its power, its sincerity, its quality of being a stream that leads to the source of things. That's where its relevance lies-- and its dynamic.

Nurit was sincere. She was searching for that quality. She sought it in people, in thoughts and in dreams. Maybe in mine as well. And in my love. Her life was an attempt. And so was mine. Like all our lives, at that.

Hefziba: When you came closer to one another, as you said, when you exchanged these...ideas...views, impressions...-could you forget who Nurit Shahari was and who you were? Could you overlook it or leave it behind? Or even surmount it, perhaps?

Gamal: Who was Nurit? Who was I? We're all wearing masks. The dark skin is a mask and so is the fair skin. Do you take our names for our fates? They only were if we

ourselves were to choose them ourselves.

Hefziba: Yet, the language you were taught is the language you speak.

Gamal: Language is colour, sound and expression. Language is the rhythm underlying the flow of our thoughts. Language is the identity our emotions take on. It is all that but in its outward appearance, for language is form and form is a mask. Were you to be born in a strange land without any chance of learning your language, would then that country's language be yours? It can't. And still you're not without language. The illusive nature of ethnic divides became obvious in Nurit and myself. Its shallowness showed in our eyes, hair and skin. Hers was the same shade and the same colour as mine, and her parents had grown up in the same language as my parents. What separates us is the mask we wear. That mask is the only difference between us. *(with spotlights on him)* And what about you? What mask are you wearing and, behind it, what is it you hide?

The scene flows into:

5th Scene

“IF WE FAIL TO SEE THAT WHAT IS IN OUR HEARTS, NO ONE SHALL SEE IT IN US”

A Haifa suburb.

In a temporary dwelling place turned permanent, made of a discarded railway carriage, Hefziba.

She addresses the audience.

Hefziba: I see faces. I see black faces and white faces and faces the colour of the East. But I do not see my own face. Is it Africa or the Middle East, blackness or whiteness, shadow or light? African or Asian, you ask. And so do I. Jew or Gentile, black, brown, Semitic, Hamitic, Israeli or Habashi-- words shall never be adequate. Why am I a stranger here? Why must anyone be a stranger anywhere? This here is my country too. But it isn't receptive. Or is it my country? What makes it? Why should or why shouldn't it be?

Yemane crosses the place, slowly approaching her.

He is the same age as Hefziba, tall, handsome and of dignified appearance. Though his gait is light, he seems to be deeply rooted in the earth.

Seeing Hefziba, with her face buried in her hands, he smiles a mildly amused, compassionate smile and strokes over her hair, softly.

Yemane (his voice reflecting the fondness of the gesture): Your tears, my sister, are like the rain over the mountains of our childhood.

Hefziba (recognising him): Yemane...

Yemane: You are beautiful. Even sorrow gives you beauty.

Hefziba: Yemane with the eyes of the ocean...Already back then, in the days when I was one of the children of those mountains, your smiling depth gave me comfort.

Yemane: Those childhood days are far. The distance between the mountains of Eritrea and the Judaeen Desert has increased the distance between present and past.

Hefziba: But you, ‘ayni, have remained the same.

Yemane: You too have remained yourself; the girl I was in love with as a little boy. *(smiles)* Only your eyes have become deeper. And unfortunately a little more sad.

Hefziba: Yemane--

Yemane: Yes?

Hefziba: Doesn’t your heart remember the country we have left?

Yemane: Don’t think of what we have left, ‘ayni. Think of what is ahead! The sun that dies in the West is reborn in the East, each morning and each day. And so time rotates and our lives change.

Hefziba: It is hard, my childhood sweetheart, to see life change without knowing what it is changing into.

(now speaking to the audience with the spotlights illuminating half her face, while leaving the other in the dark, with Yemane reduced to the contours of a supportive shadow):

I want to be part of this land. Like all of them. Like you. But the eyes through which I am seen are not my eyes. Before I came here, I haven’t been black. It was here only that I became so. Here, in the Promised Land, in the land of our fathers, in the land of our own. When, in triumph, we arrived in Haifa -on the sacred ground of the ancient homeland we yearned for- what we found was a crowd blocking our way, threatening to kill us should we dare to enter the city. And so the first thing our brothers and sisters in this ancient homeland taught us was that we were black. And that they were ready to kill us should we enter their city. We have been hungry and thirsty. We have been caught between the fronts of a war. We didn’t want to be crushed in it. We thought it was possible to flee the blood and pain and find a life that was new and promising. Their agents had advertised this fabulous country to us, built on the ground from which we derive our lineage, this

state created to reintegrate people from all parts of the world, united by the bond of their common faith and by ancestral roots they shared, all those scattered descendants of Solomon's ancient empire. Oh for the thousand languages to be melted into one! Oh for the scattered remnants to form one whole! Oh for hope and strength and salvation to the lost! What a mighty force was this idea! What a mighty dream was it that brought us here! We, the sons and daughters of Solomon, the Lion of Judea-- when we came here, we were simply black. We came into a country where there was unemployment and war. War it was, again, the smouldering conflict between the people of the dream and those who had been expelled, disinherited, un-named, made unhappen, for their lives and their breath was the obstacle to our dream, which bore their counter-dream like the earth bears the bread crop, and so our bread got poisoned. We are a part of this conflict long before we ever arrive here, long before we ever become integrated into the structures that breed it. Our brothers and sisters here count every agura the state grants us as a subsidy - too less to live, too much to die, but enough to arouse the envy of those who are not ready to pay our dream. It grew too costly. And we grew too dark under the African sun. So we go the one way that is open to us: the way into the army. We are there before they call us. We volunteer. We don't wait for our conscription, in our eagerness to show them: We're like you; we, the Falasha, are Zionists, too. Zionists ready to die for the land, deserving to be here, deserving of brotherhood and solidarity, and of a home. We shall die for them. Whether they like it or not. When a black Jew kills a black Palestinian, then perhaps things are in order. Then perhaps we have been successful in our fight for integration. We pay the price of our loyalty. We pay the price of our blood. We donated it for the healing of this country's wounds, the wounds of its body and those of its soul, sacred blood for the sacred new ancient homeland. But they threw our stored blood conserves away. This blood, which we wanted to give to this country, was nothing to them but a suspected risk to their health. They didn't even want our blood. It is in the army alone and in the Sherut Betahon that the uniform covers the colour of our skin, that treacherous witness of our coming from a poor country. Poverty is the real mystery of the blackness. *(Now the other half of her face is illuminated, with the former half being in the shade.)*

When others shared the world out among themselves, that was the place they allotted to us in the order they established. It is their eyes through which we are seen. It is their system, their order of things, their history books and their definitions by which we are defined. Reading in the "Yediot Aheronot" how fair-skinned girls love the black man's body -"et ha guf ha kushi"; are we Cushites then?-, one asks oneself how much naivety, or how much self-assurance, a man is supposed to have in him in order to take pride in that.

Or to interpret that as integration. The old stories relate how back then in the days that have now passed, when we were the Falasha of Eritrea, we'd offer food and drink to our Christian or Muslim guests and then break the glasses from which they drank, the plates from which they ate, before their eyes, for these were no Jews. These were not pure. And now we have come to the pure land of old, and our place are the suburbs. The bodies of our men are loved by fair-skinned girls and their souls are like blood that is thrown into the gutter. Our blood, purified only when it flows in the wars, and honored only then, for the dead soldier is this country's elixir of life while the living person has no value. The myth needs martyrs. Then all around us shines and radiates glory. Who needs people that

cause expenses and problems, seek employment and housing and are, at times, even black?! Where is the glory in that?

Yemane: They wouldn't have called us if they didn't need us.

Hefziba: They do. They need us as a raw material for their myth. The State of Israel needs staff to fill out its demographic vacancies. The dream, too, must have nourishment for it not to die down. That's why it is so important that we are here. But for that, we don't need to enter the cities. In the suburbs we'll do. Ideally we'd go on into the new settlements from there. There we can prove that we are proper Jews and get entitled to the privileges that go with it. There's no discrimination in the settlements because all efforts must be concentrated on fighting the Arabs. That creates a sense of belonging. It's there where people like us have their place. There we can be soldiers even if we aren't.
--- And how doesn't one lose oneself in all this?

Yemane: By learning to see ourselves through our own eyes. And by learning to see this country and its realities from our point of view. To be what we are rather than what we're expected to be. We have come here, and there's no return. We shall give of ourselves to this soil like the rain gives to the earth of its salt. And in our eyes shall be pride. The sons and daughters of this ancient tribe shall study the future at this country's universities and we shall be recognised as who we are. If only we have the courage to see ourselves. This country has changed us, and so it must. But we must change it too. It is our hope for a better life that has brought us here, and it will be our hope for a better life, that will eventually help us build one. Here, in this Eastern homeland that isn't ours alone. If God will help us to see the strength that lies deep within us, that spark of light, that flame in the heart of every man that makes him man, then the world of tomorrow will be a different world. But if we fail to see that which is in our hearts, then no one shall see it in us.

Hefziba: Let us then call things by their names, so we be called by our own.

CURTAIN.

6th Scene

“HELP ME SURVIVE”

A café in Haifa.

At one of the tables, Gamal and Nurit.

Nurit drinks cappuccino while Gamal drinks black coffee.

Nurit: You don't smoke?

Gamal: No.

Nurit: It's strange. I always associate Arabs with smoke and black coffee. That's my kind of poetry (*which is followed by a light laugh*). And my image of Morocco, of my parents and their youth and the lost East. (*laughs again and then becomes thoughtful*) Like Slimane Maghrebi singing about Agadir, songs that are smoke and black coffee, and sheesha scents. And spices...

Gamal: Slimane Maghrebi, eh? Your East is our West. (*laughs too*) Why do you call it "lost"?

Nurit: Because of this here (*indicates the city*). Because the East is my parents and their youth. It's where they're from. This here is where I am from. This here is today. And to you?

Gamal: Hm...It would be the same to me, approximately. It's today and this minute. Palestine is where my parents are from. And this here is where I am from, whatever you might call it. Though you have moved and we haven't. We have *been* moved, instead. This land has been made into another, one in which we find ourselves as strangers, like Moroccans who migrated to Paris.

Nurit: Have you ever been to Morocco?

Gamal: Me? How would I get there with an Israeli passport?

Nurit: Ah, yes, of course, you're Israeli citizens too. Strange how easily one tends to forget that...

Gamal: Does one?

Nurit: Hm, well, sometimes... Morocco must be a very beautiful place. My parents often reminisce about it, like about a treasure one possessed and lost... "The lost East", well, there you go...

Gamal: Or the lost West.

Nurit: It must be an enchanting place.

Gamal: Every place is beautiful, if one has where to live and what to live on.

Nurit: If one has--- freedom? But do you know any place on this earth where a thing like that is real? Freedom? And subsistence, equal chances and the same degree of power and influence for everyone? Take the idea of the kibbutzim. Everyone free, everyone equal, everyone part of one whole. And what has become of them? Production companies and little fool's paradises. That's what. Everywhere, anyhow, there is always a dominant element and a recessive one.

Gamal: The kibbutzim were built on the ashes of our burnt houses and villages. Where would justice come from in a house that is built on dead bodies? Where would brotherhood come from in a village that had to destroy another for it to be built?

Nurit: When *my* life is at stake, *my* survival, my children's and my people's future-- will I ask about *your* house and *your* village? Are we the only people who have ever done injustice to another? What else is history but the summary of the injustices done to one people by another?

Gamal: When the Zionist forces took Deir Yassin, there was a small girl erring through the streets because all her family had been killed. She was stopped by an Israeli soldier, and you know what he did? He put the gun aside and picked up an axe from the rubble of one of the destroyed houses. With that axe he split her head. Probably because his life was at stake, his survival and his children's future.

Nurit: In the Six Day's War, in which my uncle died, the Arab armies used to mutilate our dead soldiers by cutting off their manhood and putting it into their mouths. Let *me* ask *you* why they did *that*? As if it wasn't enough to kill them...

Gamal: Well, why, Nurit? Why? You answer that for yourself!

Nurit (startled): This is the first time you have spoken my name...

Gamal (irritated): Damn it...

We see an oversize projection of their eyes meeting each other. Eye-to-eye, their expression changes from fury and burning hatred to incredulity, shock and finally to helpless passion. Their lips meet. Their embrace is violent, thirsty, fierce, like the grasp of the drowning to a straw.

Nurit (holding Gamal's face in her hands, keeping it at a distance): Is it to kill me?

Gamal: And to you? What is it to you? To avenge the dead?

Nurit: And should we cry now, here, there would be no one but you to comfort me. There would be no one to comfort you but I.

Gamal and Nurit: Help me!

Gamal: Help me survive!

Nurit: Help me survive!

CURTAIN.

1st Trance Sequence

“I AM THE SPIDER IN WHOSE WEB YOU ARE CAUGHT”

An Igbo village.

Masked dancers and sacred drums of a festival. The meeting place is crowded with people. The men sit down on their goat skins. The women and young children keep themselves aside and watch the ceremony from the distance.

The tempo of the drum beat increases as the dancers go into trance.

A murmur goes through the village assembly as in their midst a new mask appears.

Village man: A new spirit has entered this village! An unknown, strange power clad in a mask unseen heretofore!

Second village man (in response): A spirit from across the seas, terrific in aspect and novel in form, arrived on ships carried by waves of thunder, claiming new land.

The mask breaks out of the circle of dancers and moves toward the man who spoke these words with great speed. Before him, it comes to a sharp, sudden halt.

The Mask: Men of the village! I salute you.

Village men (in unison): Our father! Our hands are on the ground.

The Mask (directly confronting the man who made the remark): Ogbuefi! I salute you.

Ogbuefi: Our father! My hand is on the ground.

The Mask: Ogbuefi, do you know me?

Ogbuefi: How can a man know you who are beyond human knowledge?

The Mask: I came on ships across the seas, trusting in fate to render mine what I find, on these as on all shores. Far has been my way, and yet not far. Kind fate has been and yet, not kind. I came forth from the depth of the earth. From the darkness of your thoughts I came forth and I coloured them in the colours of my own, for lo! I came forth, in truth, from the abyss of your own depth, from the depths of your own self which I split, placing the lowest above the highest.

In a fierce, sudden move the Mask tears off its face and a face with Ogbuefi's features appears.

Ogbuefi screams out and with him the men of the village. The women and children flee

the place in horror. Some of the men join them.

The Mask: I wear your face, Ogbuefi, and a thousand other faces. In my face, the countenance of the friend unites with that of the enemy, and I melt them into one. Tell me now, Ogbuefi, and be sure of what you say: Am I wearing your face or are you wearing mine? You are silent, my son, for you have no answer to this. I am the split and the rift in all things. My sight confuses the mortals. With strong hands moved by greed I put up my altar on which you sacrifice your names and your faces to my flame, for I am the craft of pillage and the productivity of destruction, eating up its own body and yours. By destroying you, I give you an image and an identity which you recognise as your own.

You do not know one another nor do you know your own selves--but you know *me* in my thousand appearances; in all those thousand masks that cover what you know not. I raise whom I want of you and whom I want of you I lay low. Perish who obeys me not! And perish he shall. When you lie in agony, I grow -my body saturated with your blood- to an immeasurable height. In the wars of the nations my banner is raised by all parties, and my war is waged by all the hosts. My name drips from their lips like saliva drips from your teeth in the sight of a choice dish. The rich man is a slave, and so is the poor, albeit they know it not. In the circulation of merchandise each has its place and its purpose, and is bound to the service of merchandise which alone circulates free. I carve wealth out of poverty, which is the instrument of the moulder and the magic of him by whose hands wealth is shaped. I increase profit, by these hands, where there is profit and, by these hands, I aggravate loss where there is loss. Luxury, comfort and ease are the tools by which I set one above the other, and one against the other in their pursuit, corrupting the souls of man. Driving the wheel of greed in perpetual flow by the motor of profit, I make the victims into perpetrators and the persecuted into a persecutor and the freeman into a slave, for the spiral must go upward, planting enmity between brothers and hatred between father and son, rivalry and antagonism between tribes, peoples and nations, a rift between husband and wife, between man and his fellow man, a gap. I make truth into lie and out of a lie I make my truth. The chains by which I chain you are soft and unyielding, coarse, bloody and alluring, and thus beyond resistance, for at their heart lie luxury, prosperity and gratification, rewards for the traitor and for him that resigns himself, eased at last, to the powers that be. Metal, shiny or dirty, paper work, stamped, with images imprinted, kauri shells worth naught or worth a man's life, the empire I forged of those, vesting my spirit into them, is the one that conquered all. And you, subjugated by it, all of you, do you know who conquered you? Ogbuefi, have you recognised me?

Ogbuefi remains silent.

The Mask: Have you recognised me, men of the village? I am the power that makes a man conquer worlds foreign, and forces them to surrender to him. And yet, still: Who am I? You do not know who I am. You do not know by what name to call me. I am the spider in whose web you are caught.

CURTAIN.

II.

7th Scene

“THE THIRD DIMENSION”

*The setting reverts to the café from Scene 6.
Nurit and Gamal, seated opposite each other.*

Gamal (to Nurit): What will you eat?

Nurit: Eat?

Gamal: Well---?!?

Nurit: Ice cream.

Gamal: I mean food.

Nurit: Ice cream, hamoudi, is the food of the gods.

Gamal (with a shrug): If mortals can subsist on it... *(presenting the ice cream menu to her from a stylish kind of wooden stand on the table)* Take your choice, G'varti!

Nurit: I shall take the biggest one if you pay. And the smallest if you don't.

Gamal: So there is a pragmatic element in you, after all.

Nurit: O yes, there is.

Gamal: Be my guest then, my dreamy-eyed pragmatist, and be the queen of this table, so that, in the splendour of your ice cream, your own splendour be reflected. And your reign shall be unchallenged.

Nurit: Good.

The waitress comes to their table.

Waitress: What will you eat?

Gamal opens his mouth to say “Ice cream” but Nurit is faster.

Nurit: Ice cream.

Gamal: Ice cream.

Waitress: Two ice cream, then.

Nurit opens her mouth to say “One” but Gamal is faster.

Gamal: One.

Nurit: One.

Waitress: Well--- that makes two?

Nurit and Gamal exchange a questioning look, then answer together.

Nurit and Gamal in unison: No.

Waitress: It used to, in my school time. Not that I mind... One ice cream then. For who?

Nurit: For me. And it's this one. (points at a picture at the card.)

Waitress: We don't have that one, actually.

Nurit: But it's on the card, with a picture.

Waitress: I'll cover the picture if you like. (covers the picture with her hand.) Which one do you like?

Nurit: Which one do you have?

Waitress: All apart from this.

Gamal: Then bring us all apart from this!

Waitress (nonchalantly): You are Saudi?

Gamal: That's how I speak Hebrew.

Nurit (laughs): Stop, Your Highness! Let's save some money for Texas! (points at another picture and addresses the waitress) I'll have this one.

Waitress (to Gamal): And for Your Highness?

Gamal: Coffee.

Waitress: Arab or Israeli?

Gamal: Me?

Waitress: The coffee.

Gamal: What's the difference?

Waitress: The name.

Gamal: In which case the choice is yours. Only make it a good one. Strong and dark and sweet.

Waitress (laughs): Mhm-m, like you! Beseder, as you wish.

Gamal: It seems someone wants to come to Texas with us.

Waitress (laughing): But don't sell me to Bill Clinton's harem! I won't stand the pressure, me! I'm the sleepy type. That's why I work here.

They laugh.

EXIT WAITRESS.

Gamal: And you, Nurit?

Nurit: I'm not the sleepy type, either, I believe. Nor the flirty type.

Gamal: Nor the hungry one.

Nurit: Hm, hungry! Can there be hunger where there is no satisfaction?

Gamal: You see, you're the inspiring type.

Nurit: Me?

Gamal: You're the type that asks the right sort of questions.

Nurit: I shall tell you something, and it's this: I am not hungry. But then, I'm far from satisfied. Morning, afternoon, evening: food marks the run of the day. No one asks why. Eating is like making love. Where there is love, there is freedom. Where there is hunger, there is relief. Loveless love is liberty without freedom and where one eats without hunger, what is there to be hoped for? Carcasses. Dead, empty, rotten meat. Excuse me to say. When I was a little girl -don't worry, what I'm going to tell you is perfectly

harmless- I loved taking showers in the afternoons of hot days. I would open the sprinkler only slightly, letting the water drip down on me in soft, delicious, jewel-like pearls, like dew, not like rain, so it would melt down the heat, sluggishly, in the sensation of relish. And I knew: love must be like that. That is to say I knew love, without knowing it, all the same. And moreover, it was then and only then that I knew it. And it is now that I don't.

Gamal: And who does but an oblivious child, as wisdom has been given to the fools who give themselves to wisdom?

Nurit: Life is like a geometry of two dimensions, while the third is the key. And it is lacking.

Gamal: A life within the dimensions of Euclidean geometry, at least, is a predictable life.

Nurit: But you feel nothing!

Gamal: Be glad if you don't! It makes things easier for you.

Nurit: But what gives us this endless, vast, timeless capacity for emptiness?

Gamal: The lacking dimension.

Nurit: The lamb swallowed the snake and the snake swallowed the lamb. We are not progressing.

Gamal: We are. But we are progressing backward. Perhaps the third dimension is right this. The measure of the current against the lower coordinate of its source. The fix point that lies between the two opposite streams.

Nurit: That you can reason like this without the aid of black coffee! You're a true son of the Golden Age! And love, Gamal? Which dimension is love?

Gamal: Love...You often hear about love these days.

Nurit: And you yourself are never thinking of it, of course.

Gamal: We hear about it on the radio. The more songs we sing about love, the less we need to think about it.

Nurit: Convenient.

Gamal: Not always. *(with great concentration, as if evaluating the results of a scientific study)* The daughter of a friend of mine, for instance, has left her father's house because of love. Obviously she has taken the songs too serious. Yet, still, she's so very bent on it. A young girl, but one capable of firm decisions. *(laughs)* The poor one is in love with her

tutor.

Nurit: A teacher?

Gamal: Well, one hardly older than herself. Her father engaged him. Though for a different purpose.

Nurit (laughing): If this weren't real life, no one could ever make it up!

Gamal: Life is always true to cliches. And so is love. Afterwards, we always know better. As it happens, the man is a lorry driver too. The provider of his family, and the only one at that.

Nurit: And she left her father's house because of him?

Gamal: Yes. It's a matter I was involved in, involuntarily. Her father decided to put a stop to it and sent her to live with her aunt in the autonomous territories, as the best way to separate lovers is to send one of them to Zone A and the other to Zone C, or leave him in Israel proper, for that matter. Political geography being what it is, that's much safer than sending him to the moon. But as love is said to possess magical powers, on a rare spell of easy movement, he appeared in Zone A and the aunt in question seems to be in league with the two. For the father, of course, the waves won't part and no permit is issued. If that isn't fate!

Nurit: You are bitter.

Gamal: And you are sweet.

Nurit: Well, at least you and I are in the same zone.

Gamal half laughs, half smiles, hiding himself behind different layers of sarcasm.

Nurit: So novels happen, and the thousand nights plus one are not yet over.

Gamal: Probably, they're the third dimension. Her third dimension, in any case, is that she insists on having it her own way. She confided in me at a point in time when there was no way left for me to get out of it. Her father, of course, has confided in me as well. *(as Nurit watches him interestedly, waiting for the story to continue)* There's always something impressive about impossible things. And about those determined to have them. She's a girl I grew up with. She's not the type to stage a riot. It's conventions revolting against themselves rather than she revolting against them. I met him whom she wants to marry. I talked to him. I asked him why and he asked me why not. Indeed, the arguments against it do not weigh heavier than those in favour, love being one of them. Well, they are people who resemble each other. What they want in life is the same thing, and the future they see for themselves is the same. It's only that what the girl's father wants for his daughter is another thing, and the future he sees for her is another. But, Allah al

‘Azeem, it’s not conventions alone. What prevents Abu Fathi from giving his consent is what prevents us all from taking the decisions we ought to take: fear. The conventions are merely the garments in which we clothe our fears until they suit us well. It is easy to say: Islam demands this and Islam demands that, and so we take recourse to heaven without realising that we have made Islam nothing but one more among the masks we wear. We use it without even trying to understand. We instrumentalise it. The serf has begun to call his yoke Islam. In the hands of the coward, it is a tool to make his cowardice into supreme wisdom. It covers up our fear of carrying out our conflicts face to face and assume responsibility for our deeds, for the wrongs that have been committed and for the need to put them right, for the scourges of our age: easy and ready betrayal, conventional injustice, institutionalised oppression, convenient ignorance and “safe” stagnation, with spineless inertia and complacent mediocrity at its core. We have created an anti-Islam in which Allah and the prophet are silenced, relegated merely to soothing us in our moments of despair- and a system in which one must be a hypocrite in order to survive.

Nurit (surprised): That means you landed up supporting the girl?

Gamal: I landed up taking them serious.

Nurit: You risked it...? You are critical...critical of things, Gamal? This is the first time you spoke passionately. Much of that is true...of any place... *(after a pause)* I’m sorry to find the world in the state it is in.

CURTAIN.

8th Scene

“IF NOT WE---WHO SHALL DO IT FOR US?”

Abu Fathi’s room.

Abu Fathi, Shadi, Gamal, ‘Aysha’s aunt Khalida, seated in a circle around the table.

Aysha herself is absent.

Abu Fathi: My son Shadi, let go! Let go and make life easy for us! Let go!

Khalida: Why did you let him come here if you are not even ready to listen to what he has to say?

Abu Fathi: There is nothing to listen to, Khalida. I know you had your hands in it. I’m not reproaching you. Everybody has his own head and everybody makes mistakes at times. That this little girl with her love story could impress you in spite of your age, that you would egg her on rather than restrain her, that you would willingly lend your hand to increase this chaos that is pulling your brother’s house out of the earth from the roots,

making his name another word for fitna, I don't hold it against you. I don't know what I have done to you to deserve it but I won't trouble you about it. Perhaps you can't help it... But now, only now, I ask of you: keep yourself out of my business. *(The last words are spoken with fierce emphasis.)*

Khalida: Hamoudi...I didn't interfere in the way you think. I don't know your mind. But why not listen to a few words from your elder sister who changed your diapers for you when you were too small to help yourself?

Abu Fathi (throws his hands up in despair, as his guests can't help laughing at the old woman's indestructible homegrown authority): For Allah's sake, leave us alone with your diapers!

Khalida: Would I had left you alone with them then! Would I had...-ah! *(waves it away with her hand, turning to him energetically)* What is it, Hamoudi? Do you resent me for trying to make sense of a thing that happened to us? For trying to find a solution to something you have decided there is no solution to it?

Abu Fathi: What solution? To what problem? What happened, Khalida? My 16-year-old daughter has fallen in love. Is that what you are referring to as a problem? Is she the first? We all had our dreams. But as we grow older, we learn to bury them. And things will be all right. That's what Aysha is going through right now. And that's all there is to it. Admittedly, I have myself to blame, for I have been clumsy enough to introduce the very person to her *(pointing Shadi out with his hand in an ironic gesture of appreciation)* who is the cause of our trouble, as if one needed to introduce the falcon to his prey, but then, of course, I didn't have Khalida to advise me. May Allah forgive the ignorant and protect him in whose heart there is trust!

Shadi wants to say something but Gamal holds him back.

Gamal: Abu Fathi, please forgive my interfering but, partly by your assignment and partly due to the circumstances that have arisen from it, I too have had to play a part in the events we are discussing here, much against my will, to be honest. And much against my will, I have also become a witness of the conduct and mindset of the parties involved. Abu Fathi, I speak to you as a son to his father. During my father's imprisonment and in the years following his death, it was you who looked after his widow and helped her and her children survive. I have few memories of my father. I was too young when he died. The memories of my childhood are filled with memories of you; you who stood in for him on so many occasions. We owe you -- I owe you-- in so many ways.

Abu Fathi: You owe me nothing, wallahi. Nothing, my son. Your father and I were two arms of one man, two fingers of one hand. But he did what I couldn't. He went a way few were ready to go. The country of our birth and her sons and daughters would mean nothing today if not for people like him. That's why I'm alive, in all this mess, and he, he who could perhaps have told me what to make of it, he---

Gamal: Brother Shadi and your daughter are determined not to be parted. If they can't

obtain your consent, they'll go through without it. That is what I see.

Abu Fathi looks at him with unspoken questions in his eyes, helpless for a moment.

Gamal: Our task, as I see it, is to achieve reconciliation. What is to be done, should be decided in mutual agreement.

Shadi: Abu Fathi---

Abu Fahti (interrupting him): Let us have some coffee.

Khalida: Let me prepare it for you.

Abu Fathi: Don't worry about it, sister. I will do it myself.

Shadi: The question is: what are your conditions?

Abu Fathi: You know my conditions. *(leaves for the kitchen to prepare coffee.)*

EXIT ABU FATHI

Gamal (to Khalida): There is nothing we can do.

Shadi: He doesn't speak his mind.

Khalida: He wouldn't. His world is one unspoken. A woman covers her hair but a man covers his mind.

Fathi: Too many covers, and the very brightness of the day takes on the obscurity deep night.

Gamal: Be patient, brother.

Fathi: I am.

Khalida: Is it not in the deep, thought-filled, dream-stirred nocturnal tide that the days and their inspirations are born? Sun and moon- one day. The cover and that which is behind it- one truth. Haqqun mubin.

Fathi: Mubin you call it; obvious?

Abu Fathi returns and serves his guests coffee. He then sits down and takes for himself.

Abu Fathi (to Shadi): You have come. I know what you want to say. But my answer is the bride price. Tell your father this! Let him come here, say what he has to say and hear my conditions, as it is the custom. Let them be known to him as they are known to you.

My answer is in them. More I do not have to say.

Shadi: My answer is I do not have it. My question is: What are you really saying?

Abu Fathi: It seems that to people like yourself and my daughter the established ways are no longer good enough. Well-- your answer and your question have cornered me. I understand that you are saying your intentions are clean and serious. The bride price is an old custom, Shadi. The prophet says: If agreed upon in good will, the groom's teaching his bride one surah of the Qur'an may suffice as a bride price. No one does that but everyone knows it can be done. You will know one surah, my son, don't you? But I have seen to it that my daughter knows them all. So another price is required. *(to Gamal)* Do you know, Gamal, whom I see when I look in Shadi's face? Your father. This is why I cannot give my daughter to him.

Khalida (raising her index finger): Listen!

Abu Fathi (to Gamal): What I did for your father, will I be alive long enough to do it for him? You know how your father lived and you know how he died. So Shadi will live, and so *(to Shadi)* he will die. And who then will feed his children? Arafat? If you'd give my daughter 30.000 Shekel, she'd have something to go by, at least, however negligible the amount will turn out to be when it comes to that. But you can't pay it. And you may be dead before you can.

Shadi: Do you want a double security for everything? Do you forever want to live your life with a false bottom? Do you think that is possible for people who live and die? That that is a luxury people like us can afford?

Abu Fathi: There are people who can live in this world and make of it a living. You are not one of them.

Shadi gives a bitter laugh.

Abu Fathi: Why, my friend? Because you haven't learnt to suffer in silence.

Shadi: Suffering is never silent. You may choose to close your eyes to it but it takes a blind man not to see it. You may choose to close your ears to it. But it takes a deaf man not to hear. You may choose to silence your heart to suffering, Abu Fathi. To your own and to that of others. But you have to tear it out of your breast to do so.

Abu Fathi: You shut up about my heart! My heart! Not I have torn it out of my breast but others. I lost my wife when your glorious Intifada started. She was on a visit to one of her sisters in Jerusalem when the riot broke out. They cordoned off entire Arab Jerusalem, Sheikh Jarra and the villages, the West Bank and all, so she couldn't get back home. The last thing I heard of her was that she was shot by Israeli soldiers when she tried to resist the arrest of her 11-year-old niece.

You know what they do to our children in their prisons, legs broken and souls wounded

to death, martyr's souls, courtesy of Rabin. Shalom Izhak! My son with his rotten business seems to have disappeared from the surface of this earth. Another life thrown to the dogs. What again? What more am I going to lose?

Shadi: What else have we got to lose? Save our very chains themselves?

Abu Fathi (icily): I, for one, have a daughter to lose.

Khalida: Or to keep, Hamoudi. That is the point. You can lose her by sacrificing her to the plans you have made for her or you can retain her by letting her go. By being with her, instead of against her, by lending her your hand when she goes her first steps in this life against which you cannot protect her, instead of barring her way. For if we lose our children, it is they who have lost us first.

Abu Fathi: By lending her my hand to go the first steps on the road to a life that will make her wilt away like a dead twig on the branches of time?! La ya sitti! Men of Shadi's disposition make no husbands. Gamal's father gave his life fighting alongside Arafat against the occupation and your husband wanders in and out of the jails because he already is an opponent of Arafat. Where is that going to end? Where, my son Shadi? Where, sister, and when? If fate strikes, you won't even have the little pension Al Fatah manages to pay its widows.

Khalida: You are talking about living people as if death had been decreed on them a long time ago.

Abu Fathi: It has, sister. It has indeed. It's the ultimate price of resistance. The occupation tolerates no dissent, and do you believe Arafat will save his opponents' lives in the long run, down in his new city state principalities of Jericho and Gaza?

Khalida: Abu Ammar is not different from you, Hamoudi. He can't help being a mortal. You don't wish to give your daughter to Shadi but if he could offer you the security of 30.000 Shekel you would agree to the bargain, even if security itself is an illusion, for you say: a little is better than nothing. And so, in his old age, thinks Abu Ammar. Knowing he doesn't have much time left, he wants to make sure something is being achieved in his name, for he dreads ending up like Amin Al Hussaini. So he says: If you offer me a Palestinian National Authority and a flag complete with an anthem and a few stretches of land to administer and call Palestine, I shall take it, for a tiny stretch of land is better than none and a curtailed sovereignty is better than no sovereignty at all. So when he dies there is something of which he can say: "It hasn't been there before me." But to us, and to those who have more time to spend on this earth than him and must make a living within those two stretches and their torn map, who have been prisoners before and find themselves prisoners still, this simply isn't good enough. As for my husband, little brother, whatever you may say against him, he is better than a lot of other men. When there was no medicine and no prayer that could make me bear his children, he did not bow to his family's pressure but he stuck with me, saying: "Life is you and I." Whatever it was apart from that, to him it was him and me first. Do you

understand? This is what Shadi says of himself and Aysha. They've embarked upon the same way and what they want is the same thing. I have never regretted being his wife and I believe, after all and in spite of everything, he might be content enough with being my husband. And what would you have us do, Abu Fathi? Do we have any other choice but stand up to the pressure?! It is not for me or for him. It is for this generation and the next, and for the children and their children after them. Do you want them to live a life as we have to put up with? And must refuse to put up with, in fact! And so we do. Is there any alternative to standing up for our rights, brother, and waging the daily struggle to liberate ourselves and those after us of our scourges and yokes? And if not we- who shall do it for us?

We must learn to trust our children, for the future lies in their hands. Then they might one day teach us to trust ourselves...

Spotlights from the left center on Shadi.

Shadi: I see Palestine in the image of a girl, radiant with the clean whiteness of a pebble on the sea shore and sweet like a passion fruit, both sleeping and wide awake at the same time, with bright, eager eyes, looking out at the sea and bathing her feet in the sand of the deserts, as if seeing the world for the first time. There is a voice deep within her, and that voice listens to its own breath, with painful intensity, speaking words that are at the heart of mankind.

Aysha. It is Aysha that I see when I dream of my freedom. It is her tears that I see when I think of my pain. The future of Palestine is my future and hers, for my love and my land are one.

Spotlights from the centre focus Khalida.

Khalida (to Abu Fathi): You have lost your son. Don't lose your daughter as well!

Spotlights from the left center in Abu Fathi.

Abu Fathi (helplessly, speaking to himself as if he were alone): If I should lose her, I should lose myself. The night hurts my eyes. It makes prominent in my heart the outlines of the walls, by which every movement is restricted. Our movement from one day to the next is a movement from one wall to the other. There must be something behind them. There must be something else in the world but walls. But we have long forgotten what it is.

Spotlights from the centre focus on Khalida.

Khalida (in a similar mood, though without his uncertainty, more to herself than to him): The yoke is not only outside. The wall does also grow within ourselves. Nothing can be imposed upon you that your own self is not ready to bear. To surmount our fears, therefore, we must surmount ourselves. That self, that is, from which they spring. In doing so, we shall surmount also the yoke and the wall. And that, brother, is the only way to remain true to the essence of that what we are.

CURTAIN.

9th Scene

“BLOOD IS RED WHEREVER IT FLOWS”

The restaurant.

Nurit and Gamal.

Setting as in Scene 7.

During Gamal's narration, Fathi, Shadi and the 1st and 2nd Brother appear in the background.

Nurit: And what became of Fathi?

Gamal: He joined a religious brotherhood.

Nurit: That Fathi? The one who dealt in drugs?

Gamal: Him. His way ended in an impasse and thus he was brought to a halt. He needed to remake himself. And so he did. A drug courier cum-addict, he made it to Spain, and there, stuck, stoned, and stunned, he encountered his religion. He had mentors to guide him, friends ready to extend their hand when everyone else was turning their backs. He found them in his hour of need. And it was as if they had waited for him. And so, indeed, they had.

The realm of those arms sensing the fall of the needy and stretched out to carry him into a new life with them was a hidden and powerful one. They acted with the self-evidence of the non-existing, yet well-respected, yet business-shares-holding elite of outcasts. And to Shadi, lost in his darkness, they spoke:

Spotlights illuminate background.

1st Brother: There is light. Perceive it or close thy eyes to it, light is light is light.
For every way lost there is a new way to be gained.
As thou art, brother, so indeed are we all.
And what we are seeking, lo, it is the same thou hast lost.
This world, bereft of the light of guidance, is naught
But thy mirror and ours
Distorted, torn, bleeding
And as hungry for light as we are.

2nd Brother: Saturate thy body with the enjoyment of this world until it is tired of it
And feed it thy desires until it is sick of them and wishes to know of them
No more!
Yet, thou shalt be wanting
And thy soul, scarred by images of alien making
And torn asunder by a world alien to itself
Shall be asking:
Who has crippled me so?

Shadi: Who?

1st Brother: He that owns it.

2nd Brother: He that desired ease and succumbed to the temptations of the day.

Shadi: What are they?

1st Brother: Foreign rule and the imitation of foreign ways,
Yielding to the seduction of foreign notions and fashions,
Preference of the short-lived over the everlasting,
Laxity in the struggle
And love of the ephemeral.

Shadi: What is the struggle?

2nd Brother: The quest for the unchangeable,
Unchanging,
Changeless.

1st Brother: It is the sword and shield of those
Whom change has disowned,
Whose eternity the ephemeral has questioned,
Whose supreme rule
Foreign invaders have conquered.

Shadi: And where then is the light?
In the re-establishment of their rule?

2nd Brother: The answer is Islam.

Shadi: And what is that light?

1st Brother: Islam.

2nd Brother: And what is Islam?

1st and 2nd Brother: The return to day one.
The cancelling of all history that lies in between.
It is the light and the truth and the re-establishment of the powers
Who rule of right,
Whom change has disowned,
Whose eternity the ephemeral has questioned,
Whose unchallengeable authority
Foreign invaders have shaken.

Shadi: Those powers, my brothers,
Who are they and what is their rule?
What are their ends and what their ways?
What is their name and disposition?

1st Brother: Questions, my brother, are shadows of doubts.
For your sore and tired soul to heal,
Not questions are required but certainties,
Not word- and mind plays and not the kick
Of sly sophistication,
But the ability to let yourself fall,
Without net,
Into the heavenly peace of that
Which is certain,
Unquestioned, elemental,
Pure,
Unassailable, sacrosanct, sacred.

2nd Brother: Our end is Islam and our way is the path
Of the martyrs.
For what, my brother, have you left to lose in this life?

Shadi (with a dismissive gesture): Oh!

There's nothing left of life but pain.
Nothing but pain it leaves of me.
It is a life people I never saw
Have stepped on with their feet
From the day of my birth to the day of my death
And even long before;
A garbage dump to the powers that be,
A log in their fire
That eats up our heart.
There's nothing in it and nothing about it
To love,
Nothing to cling to
And nothing
I should not gladly cast away.

2nd Brother: But what, by death, have you to gain!

Shadi: Liberation, perhaps! Mine and that of those after me!
An end to this suffering and a way out of this life,
Even if it means to leave it behind
-And maybe especially then;
In a death violent with meaning and sudden
Rather than endless, protracted and slow,
Void with insignificance.-
An answer, finally! The power to speak and be heard and, for one
Second, a power excessive and greater than all other power:
That over life and death.

1st Brother: Martyrdom and the Gardens of Bliss.

2nd Brother: The chance to be someone,
One time
In your life.

Shadi: A power that merits
Its price.

Spotlights fade and the illumination focuses Gamal.

Gamal: And that's how he came back; a man reborn. We saw his change and his new self with happiness, at first, and soon enough with unease. When he set out to bring us in

line ideologically, his points were taken up by Shadi, who bumped into him one day, as he was at it, and he asked him:

Illumination changes to center on background once again.

Shadi: The age you want us to revert to,
Have you known it?
The law you call unquestionable,
What is it and how did it emerge?
It is made up of questions,
My brother,
And emerged of the search for an answer
To them.
Was it not said of the prophet:
“He is an ear.”?
And does not the Qur'an answer:
“If he is, then he is so
For your sake.”
Does he not speak of prophets foreign
And did he not lend a willing ear
To every question?
Was it not him who prescribed the question and the search,
Making it compulsory
To all,
Insisting that every age,
And every man and woman in it,
Seek their own answers
On their own
As if no question had ever been satisfactorily answered before
So the world be reborn
With every new generation?!
What is the Qur'an but a continuous discourse?
Were those not the days when God himself could be questioned
And would answer?
What, then, have you in common with it?

What is this Islam of yours
But a history denied?
A voice silenced,
A truth concealed,
A revelation converted into a fairy tale at your convenience,
Remainder of a book you do not read.
You have taken great trouble to learn it by heart,
But read you do not,

And therefore you do not see
Anything but your own distorted shadow,
Which you have taken in exchange for the mind it proclaims,
By which reading occurs and sight is acquired
And cognition of inner and outer self unfolds.
Alas! He whom half a word suits better
Than the inconvenient depth of a sentence,
Who made himself the owner and subject of a story
He constructed of fragments patched together at will,
Reading one aya without reading the other,
He
That denies the greatest gift of all,
Easily does his word echo
In hearts that were silent for too long,
Hearts that sought to survive in the guise of another,
Having lost their own rhythm
And having learnt to despise it
In the grip of a world concealed from them
And unknown.

Spotlights shift to Nurit.

Nurit: The fate of every people dominated by another. It's the measures and the dimensions. Lost, messed up, confused... It's a present and a past between which there is no bridge.

They end and begin abruptly. The past is like a temple destroyed. Our fathers and us seem to have nothing in common.

Spotlights shift to Gamal.

Gamal: It is only the rupture that makes it seem so to us. The trauma of loss. Loss of self, self-knowledge and self-respect. Loss of dimensions, as you say, and measures.

Spotlights shift to Fathi.

Fathi: It is imperative, therefore, to purge our minds of the outside world.
In solitude, alone with ourselves, we shall be ourselves alone,
Re-conquer our own world
And rebuild the lost temple,
Glorious
In rebirth.

Spotlights shift to Shadi.

Shadi: Then, again,
There shall be a world of which we know nothing.
And if it intrudes into the sacredness of our forbidden temple,
Once again,
We shall be defenseless.

Spotlights on Fathi.

Fathi: It will not come to that.
Attack,
The brothers teach,
Is the best defence.
Our wall shall be of iron within
And our sword without
Shall be of iron.

Spotlights on Shadi.

Shadi: So they teach.
But let me ask you:
When the enemy invaded our fortress,
When the coloniser set his foot and his boots on our soil,
Swallowing more and more of it in an at times rapid,
At times nearly imperceptible pace,
Who opened them door and gate?
Who were the first to adopt European ways?
And how if not for them
Could he have found his way in?

What is it that makes them oppose
Yesterday's ally today?
The crumbs that were their share then
Are no longer good enough
When they feel that they are ready to have a go at the whole bread
And claim, thereby, their equal share
Of your blood and your sweat
That are its dough.

No, brother,
The rain shall not flow upward
And the pashas of yesterday will not be today's liberators.
The Effendiya won't trade their silk for your cotton
Save as a means of disguise.
What they ask us to trade our minds for
Is t h e i r instinct,
Which is the instinct of a class.

What is it really they want to replace America and Israel with? I tell you: It is their own America and their own Israel.

Spotlights on Gamal.

Gamal: And he asked him:

Spotlights on Shadi.

Shadi: What for
And against what
Do you fight?

Spotlights on Fathi.

Fathi: Those of us that are hungry
Fight hunger.

Those of us that are poor,
Poverty.

Those of us that are oppressed,
Oppression.

And all of us,
Being victims of injustice and oppression,
Fight for an end
To both.

Spotlights on Gamal.

Gamal: But Shadi replied:

Spotlights on Shadi.

Shadi: Is it hunger
Or hunger's colour?

Is it poverty
Or poverty's colour?

Is it oppression
Or the colour of oppression?

What is the source of our poverty?
And what the source of the wealth
Of those that live by it,
Their power growing proportionally to it,
Fat, radiant
And generous?

Is it injustice and repression you fight
Or merely the flag
Behind which the oppressor is hiding his face?

Shadi turns to the audience.

And I tell you: The Islam of the oppressor is not the Islam of the oppressed.
The oppressor, says Islam and means oppression
But Islam, so the oppressed knows, is the revolt against oppression.
The exploiter says Islam and means exploitation.
But Islam, so the exploited know, is the revolt against exploitation.
The despot speaks of Islam and means ignorance, illiteracy and darkness
But Islam, knows the man and the woman whose life, of all commodities, is the cheapest
As the river of their soul runs dry in the darkness of serfdom,
Islam
Is the illiterate's struggle over his first word read,
With the force of the first sun-ray
In the lives of those imprisoned in night,
Their first step on their own feet
And their first glimpse of themselves,
Which is the mother of all
Revolutions.

Thus indeed,
I say:
Islam
To the ruling classes
Is a term to sanctify their rule,
The walls they set up,
The outer and inner limits of their world,
And a title of ownership, forged
By a hand too powerful to be questioned
Like their grip on land and life,
Village and city
That makes them rule
By owning

But on the lips of the dispossessed
And on the tongues of those who own nothing
It is a different word,
And its promise is one unforgotten
And its truth and its impulse are present
In every call to prayer,
Which in their ears and on their lips
Becomes a call
To shed their chains.
“Your enemy”,
The satisfied tells the hungry,
“Is the Jew.”
But he, the hungry, knows
By the pain in his intestines:
My enemy
Is hunger.

And so is his,
Though he is taught,
By the same teacher,
Who is the guise and disguise of both,
Our hunger and his,
To believe his enemy to be
The Arab.

“Thou art acquainted”, says Mawlana,
“With the fundamentals of the religion,
But look upon thy own fundamental and see
Whether it is good.
For thy own fundamental, to thee,
Is better than the two fundamentals of the law
So that, in it, thou mayest know
Thy own essential nature.”

Spotlights shift back to Nurit and Gamal.

Gamal: But Fathi died with an explosive belt wrapped around him. To him, there was no other way. The day his father received the news of his son's death was the day he consented to Aysha's marriage to Shadi.

Nurit: When did it happen?

Gamal: It happens all the time. It is meaningless to know the hour and the day. Blood is red whenever it flows, and wherever. And it flows every minute, yours and ours, mingling in dark pools. And there, lost, it screams silently.

Nurit: We must come together in the end. We're nothing if we can't.

Gamal: You and I?

Nurit: Not you and I alone. But you and I too. You and I too.

Gamal (softly stroking her hair, with great tenderness): Habibti...

CURTAIN.

10th Scene

“WHAT ARE YOU DRIVING AT?”

The living room of the Shahari family.

Nurit's father sits at the table waiting for his evening dinner while Nurit and her mother are in the kitchen, busy preparing it.

Nurit's Father (addressing the audience): And here's another Israeli evening for you. I'm sitting here and wait my food. Grammar means nothing to me. Outside, there's a soft wind, and it's blowing. I'm back from work. So, as a matter of course, I sit here. The sea's not far from here. I can smell its tang and its salt. Yet, if I paid no attention to it, I wouldn't notice. But on evenings like this I'm drawn to the scent, and I seek it out.

Our army is throwing scat-rockets on South Lebanon once again. One of our soldiers has died on the Lebanese border. There's no innocence in this world, and if you're seeking the innocent you are seeking in vain.

Around me there's Haifa, a city with no innocence either and with no innocent souls living in it. The streets are empty after darkness in this city. In Tel Aviv, and even down in Jerusalem, life begins when darkness falls. But Haifa, it seems, prefers a good night's sleep.

In the kitchen there's my wife and my daughter. And still, dear friends, I am waiting for my dinner. *(He listens, as we hear the door bell ring.)* Someone is ringing the door bell. Maybe he's smelled the food. *(shouting for Nurit)* Nurit!

Nurit's Voice: Yes.

Father: Open the door!

We hear the door being opened and Nurit and her mother exchange greetings with the visitor, who proceeds to enter the living room. He is a man in his seventies, tall and energetic, despite his progressed age.

ENTER ROSENBAUM.

Father: Shalom, Mar Rosenbaum! I welcome you to the humbleness of this hut. How are matters?

Rosenbaum: Shalom, Eli. My matters are in perfect order. What about yours?

Father: They're in a mess, of course. Pray take a seat!

Rosenbaum: Thank you. *(He sits down.)* Your daughter, I must say, is growing more beautiful by the day. She's become a young lady, almost intimidatingly real. If that's the expression...

Father: She's adorable.

Rosenbaum: I can still see her sitting on my knees -a bold memory for an old man, seeing her as she is today- playing with that doll...whatever did she call her?

Nurit (entering the room): Ruti.

Rosenbaum: Ruti. Indeed. After a story I told you.

Nurit: I still have her.

Rosenbaum: And do you still play with her?

Nurit: Sometimes.

Rosenbaum: Very good.

Sarah brings the food.

Father (inviting the guest as the food is served): Please! Bevrakha!

The family and their guest begin to eat.

Sarah: Take some salad, Nurit!

Nurit: No, thanks.

Sarah: It's vitamins. It's what keeps you going. You never eat them.

Father: You are refusing the very thing that makes you beautiful and strong.

Rosenbaum: Take a little bit of it, then, thinking of the children you'll bear.

Sarah: Stop it.

Nurit: I simply don't like eating salad. I've got no taste for it. That's why I tend not to eat it.

Father: Who asks of your tastes? Why don't you simply eat it, so this talk will stop and I can take in my own food in peace?

Nurit: Because that's not my way of life.

Rosenbaum: Your daughter is a nice girl.

Father: Yalla, Mar Rosenbaum, I can give her to you if you like.

Rosenbaum: Poor old me, what shall I do with her?

Father: Y o u r problem.

Rosenbaum: Well, she's too old for adoption and too young for a wife.

The remark causes some laughter, though not too much.

Father: Sell her.

Nurit: Someone like me is not easily sold.

Father: I bet you're right there.

Sarah (to Nurit): You're taking a long time over your meal. You're picking at your food like something is not right. *(She looks intensely at Nurit, contemplating her and then says)* What happened?

Nurit: I have to talk to you.

(All eyes are on her, which causes her to pause for a second, braving herself. The spotlights focus on Nurit's parents and their guest as they are listening to her.)

There is something I have wanted to tell you about. I've wanted to say this for a long time. You are my family, my parents who raised me. You have to know about this. At least, this is what conventions demand, for we are social beings and what not...- even if, when one thinks of it, what I will have to tell you might be rather far from agreeing with conventions. But you will get to know it anyway.

(Now the spotlights feature Nurit.)

Whatever I will say, I ask your patience. My mind, my awareness, my emotions -that is to say: me-, my whole thinking, is, am, are -- confused. But I can no longer ignore it. Plus, I can't hide it from you. As long as I can think back, my heart has been filled out by a

feeling of loneliness, so much so that there was no room for anything else. Emptiness was the substance of my world and the essence of myself was hypocrisy. My eyes were wide open, thirsty for the sight of the stars but when I looked up to heaven, I didn't feel safe. It was too vast, I guess, and my perspective too limited. It felt like losing the ground under my feet. Still, I couldn't help longing for it, and longing became a monotonous pain, driving me to seek this vastness, which became my obsession, and I began to see the fragments of what could have been I, and so I, too, was torn. The ground on which I stood, however, solid and immobile as can be, was torn-ness itself, canonised and denied, nourished by the thousand fears that we refuse to name. Shallowness, in this world, is our only protection. It allows its pillars to remain stable by merit of their unquestionability: conventions silently agreed on, taboos to make our thoughts stop at the threshold of doubt, when there's the threat of trespassing into the no-man's-land where it begins, songs about dead soldiers and black veils in the faces of their widows, whose features have become living monuments of our national consciousness, some kind of eternal justification for everything we do. I devoted myself to the fragrances, colours, sounds and tastes of this country, to its resilience and to that damn vitality of its without ever seeing it, without ever realising that it is this vitality that is the very clearest symptom of our depression, of our despair and speechlessness, our incapability of finding an answer to the existential question we face every day. Or which, to say it all, we don't face.

The spotlights focus the following three speakers and then go back to Nurit.

Father: What are you driving at?

Rosenbaum: At the answer.

Father: The answer. You found it?

Sarah: She shouldn't talk so much, really. She should finish her food.

Nurit: I found it, father. *(to Sarah)* I'm tired of this, mother. I'm tired of eating my food and sticking it out, losing myself in compromises until I can no longer recognise myself in the mirror. I found the answer, and to me it was like the first drop of rain after a thousand years of drought. I found it in the night-coloured eyes of an Arab - in whose voice reverberates the dust of this land and in whose smile shines its sweetness, with the wistfulness of the sabras in bloom. The encounter of our looks has erased our bounds, and, boundless now, I see clear. There is the light of a hope in whose rays the guns, the tanks and the bombs burn -and the wretched threat that comes from them, until they're nothing but scare ghosts, shadows and nightmares of the past.

The spotlights, in a flash, focus on Nurit's father, then go back to Nurit.

Father: And what is this hope?

Nurit: We.

Sarah (with spotlights on her, speaking like under shock, or at the discovery of a long hidden betrayal): You love him.

Silence.

Then Nurit's father gets up, deciding to act because something needs to be done. The intensity of the spotlights increases as they draw in on him.

Father (shouting): Yalla, draw the curtain!
We don't know what to do.
From our ranks there has emerged a traitor.
It's my daughter.
She's a failure, a misshape, an apostate.

The curtain is drawn. Abruptly, all spotlights are turned off.
We hear noises and screams. Somebody shouts:

1st Voice: Down! To the ground!

2nd Voice: Watch out!

We hear a shot.

3rd Voice: It's over.

From somewhere behind the drawn curtain we hear Nurit's father say:

There is darkness and things fall apart.

2nd Trance Sequence

“SPEAK, AT ALL COSTS, NOW!”

A Far Eastern Setting.

Musicians, supporting actors and characters from the play enact a procession that is half Huang Mei Style Beijing Opera and half Buddhist ceremony. They all wear over-dimensional masks.

Music and gongs.

1st Mask (Nurit's Father): And I cry out to you: What a world of delusions!
How is one to differentiate between right and wrong
any longer?!
What is truth and what falsehood in our hearts
And in our records?
What is our glory and what our shame?
Which are the faces and which are the masks?
Is light then something dark?
Or radiant?

Lama (Rosenbaum): Let us imagine a land that lies in entire darkness
And in which countless creatures rush to and fro
With blind eyes,
Straying and groping like men
Dazzled
By the dark.

Music and gongs.

Second Mask (Nurit) : Let there be light!

Third Mask (Gamal) : Be and there was.

Priest (Rosenbaum): When your soul shall depart
From the state of appearance that was its prison,
On the way from one home
To another,
On its path from one time
Into another time,
Then,
On its journey of eternities,
It needs to pass through all the stages
Of terror, confusion and pain,
Madness and stark revelation
On the painful way to itself.

A cross road
Holds two paths,
Two ways
And two lives
Of which
You must choose one.

Be therefore to your chariot
A careful conductor
Who drives it
Without fear,
With thoughts rendered clear
By reason discerning
And a heart knowing and true to its call
On the cross-roads of life, which,
Through death, leads back to itself
In its cycle,
Gaining depth by returning
To what can never be the same.

(Gongs.)

Second Priest (Abu Fathi): At the encounter
Of the terror
Your heart shall seek to deny
Everything of the world it has known
Beaten into awareness, it can cry out but
For deception
For the aspect of truth
Is the most unbearable of things.
Nothing to protect yourself from it
But illusion,
Nothing but deception
To offer shelter from it.

First Priest (Rosenbaum): Guard your soul
At that moment
And let a child be your guide!
Be wise as a child is wise,
In-expectant and prideless,
Free of dogma's anxiety
And therefore
Undeceived,
Opening its eyes to the light
And, without blindness, seeing
The world
For the first time.

Second Priest (Abu Fathi): Woe to the soul
That is shaken
By the sight cast unto you
Smitten
And cut in two
By the apparition of demons

That seem to you
Deities,
Drinking blood, with freezing smiles
From the bleached crania of men,
Their aspect never softening,
Their thirst never quenched,
But increased
With every vein cracked,
Every soul torn apart
And every flower burnt in the flames
Of each millennium of fear.

Gongs. Drums. Music.

Second Mask (Nurit): Let there be light!

Third Mask (Gamal): Be! And there is.

Nurit steps forward to take the centre of the stage. The procession surrounding her parts like waves to make way for her.

Nurit (speaking very calmly): Fear is a coward excuse. For fear is nothing. Try to give it a name and you will find there is none. Look at these deities! Don't avert your eyes! Look and see what they are. Try to describe them and you will find you can't. For they're scare ghosts. No bodies. No souls. Notions that are conjurations out of hot air. The reason why we can't bear their sight is that the world into which we grew is made up of such notions. But we can never be free until we have found in us the strength to face up to our own reflection and see things for what they are. A freedom that has shallowness for its price is the freedom of a slave. A freedom that consists in the choice between one prison or another is a bone thrown to a dog on a chain, who can't ever go far enough to reach it. Too often, when we speak of freedom, it turns out to be that kind of freedom we're speaking of, and too often we become its captives; a freedom that doesn't even grants us the right to speak our own words and to think our own thoughts, and so when we think, our thoughts are like prisoners and when we speak, our words are like thieves. And the notions make up our universe are the carrion into which we turn when we burn in our tanks.

As gongs and music resound at full force, the actors remove their masks and robes, carrying the scene into another sequence.

The cast forms a circle around Aysha (Anne Frank), Nurit (Oum Sabr), Nurit's Mother (Oum Ahmad) and Nurit's Father (Man from Marda), all four of them now in the striped prisoner uniforms of the German concentration camps, wearing the yellow star inscribed JUDE.

Aysha steps forward, clasping the pages of a diary. The circle opens up to make way for her.

Aysha: I don't want to have lived in vain,
Like most people.
I want to be useful or to give joy to the people that live around me,
And who, yet, do not know me.
I want to live on
Even after my death.

A military judge (the 1st Brother from Scene 9, who will reappear as the First Shin Bet Officer in Scene 13) steps out of the circle surrounding her.

Military Judge: That's why you're attacking our tanks with your stones?

From the circle surrounding Aysha, Abu Fathi steps forward, acting as defence lawyer.

Defence Lawyer: It cannot be established whether these were stones or tomatoes.

Military Judge: What's the difference?

A third actor, a Jewish settler, with a kipah on his head and a gun over his shoulder (the 2nd Brother from Scene 9, who will reappear as the second Shin Bet Officer in Scene 13,) steps forward from the circle.

Settler: What for are we talking to them at all! As if they had a soul like ours! Short proceedings is what I say. Just round them up and shoot! Khalas. We're much too tender, dear! That's why they always prevail. Perpetrating acts of terrorism unscathed! They're doing it over and over again! *(to Aysha)* Who do you think you are?! *(spits out)* And we bother with legal formalities.

Military Judge (to Aysha): Do you plead guilty?

Aysha: And you?

Military Judge (pointing at Aysha with his index finger, to the audience): These elements are disturbing the peace process.

Nurit (Oum Sabr) steps forward.

Nurit: My name is Oum Sabr. We are from Bayit Hanoun. Our living is obtained from the dump where the inhabitants of the settlement Nisanit dump their rubbish. This rubbish dump is the heart of our economy. It's our life vein. For our daily bread comes from there. Now we're autonomous and we are very proud. It's only that the dump has now become a border area and is guarded by Israeli soldiers who patrol the area between Nisanit and our village. When my son went there to search the rubbish, they shot him. But I ask you: what do we have to live on if you're cutting us off from the dump?

Defence Lawyer: For what reason was he shot?

Military Judge: Why, the reason is obvious. She's explained it herself.

Nurit: Not t h e y are standing trial but we.

Military Judge: You guard your tongue, woman! I won't have this kind of propaganda here. You're putting yourself at risk of administrative detention.

Defence Lawyer: Objection! No security threat can be construed from my client's statement or person. She is a woman unable to fend for herself, who consequently lacks the means of causing any harm to the security of the state. There is therefore no apparent reason for administrative detention.

Military Judge: Objection overruled. No reason needs to be specified for causing administrative detention. These people are posing a threat to the security of the state by their very existence. This character, secondly, isn't any client of yours. She's just a bystander who interferes with the session, seeking to obstruct the cause of justice. No court in the world concerns itself with these people's matters.

Defence Lawyer (casting every caution aside and appealing to the accused): Speak, brothers! Sisters, speak! Speak, at all costs, now! What you say here and now shall be heard.

Nurit's Mother: I'm Oum Ahmad, of Marda. They seized our land in order to develop the Jewish settlement Ariel. They've cut us off from the water supply.

Military Judge: This is contempt of court. You'll pay for it.

Defence Lawyer: My client is an aged woman...---

Military Judge (interrupting him): She isn't an old woman, that one. What she looks like is not how old she is. I will have you and your so-called clients removed from this court.

Nurit's Mother: We have a well in our village. But the water it gives us is polluted and bitter. During the hot season when we're pining for it, the well can't provide us with half of what we need. We're dying with thirst while the people in Ariel amuse themselves in their swimming pools and smilingly water their gardens. This happens in front of us, right under our own wilting eyes. We're dried out and withered like plants, deprived of the water of life.

Nurit's Father (Man from Marda): The water they use is ours, which they have taken from us in violation of natural and international law.

Military Judge: Shut up ya sharmouta! What do you know of international law?!

Nurit's Father: The trees and orange groves they cut down and the water resources they seize are our life and our soul. They're the infrastructure of this place. There's no life without them. But their aggressions are covered by the paragraphs of what they call their peace accords. Oslo is nothing but a deceitful mirage. I know this woman's son (*pointing at Nurit [Oum Sabr]*). They said he was trying to trespass Israeli territory. But that's a sham. What really happened was this: When he and his brother were searching the dump, jeeps with Israeli soldiers drove up and arrested them. They beat them up badly and when they were trying to run for it, they chased after them and gave fire. That's how Sabr was shot. A boy of 13. His death was slow and he was long dying, in hopeless, protracted agony.

Defence Lawyer: What about the Palestinian police? Are they not stationed in the area as well?

Nurit's Father: Of course, but the agreements give them no authority to act. Matters involving citizens of Israel are out of their jurisdiction, and where actions by the armed forces of the state of Israel are concerned, they have no legal right to interfere.

Defence Lawyer: Did anybody, ever, investigate this case in order to establish whether, as we have rather strong reason to suspect, a violation of the law has occurred?

Nurit's Father: A violation of w h o s e law?

Defence Lawyer: Has anything, ever, been done about it?

Nurit's Father: No, sir. Such things happen. We are poor. Who cares whether we die this way or another?

Music and gongs resume.

Lama (Rosenbaum): This is the twilight that lies at the heart of the dawn.

The confusion of images
Is truth decried
Heresy.
For the path to awareness
Leads through a labyrinth
Of disguises
In which dissolution begets
Clarity.

Nurit (holding up a stone): This stone is my heart,

Hardened by pain
But not dead.
It is a stone from which blood flows
When it bleeds from its wounds,
Scarred by the whip of occupation

But scarred also
By the thorn crown of love
That is the bread of life.

This stone is the cry of a child
And the weapon of those deprived
Of all weapons.
It is only
The first word
Of a voice that refuses
To die.

Aysha: And I want to live on
Even after my death.

CURTAIN.

III.

11th Scene

“SI MURGH”

*The stage set shows the silhouettes of Jerusalem (middle), Haifa (right) and Yafo (left).
Below, superimposed on the pictures, we see a magnified image of sand on the ruins of
destroyed Arab villages.*

On the stage, Gamal.

He addresses the audience.

Gamal: It is the wind that carries in its sighs the sea's tangy fragrance to mingle its
aroma with the souq's heavy scents. Earthen scents and desert scents. The stony
sweetness of this land. Come and feel it! Taste its sun and its moon! Taste the sounds and
the colours of this life, whose yesterday, today and tomorrow speaks in voices like wings
in our poems and songs. And you will know what our struggle is about.

You ask of Nurit. Your question, my friends, stirs the silence; a silence that is rarely
broken. At times, though, there is a cry like a piece of glass the colour of blood,
flickering in the sun of the noon, surrounded by contours that are covered in darkness.
Nurit was an idea, the image of a longing perhaps, a heavy mirage on the lips of one
thirsty projected onto a wasteland of hopes. The answer, as does any answer at all,
depends on the way the question is asked. And there are questions that contain their

answers in themselves. To her, I was such a question, the one that always arises, and to myself, I am myself.

My love for Nurit was a love and a statement, and to itself, it was a law. As was Aysha's love for Shadi. It is a love condemned to live in disguise where polarisation, cowardice and indecision prevail and hatred shapes our notions into a travesty of life's truths.

The day she let me see her heart was the day when the old world died and a new world emerged. It was a question of who of us would dare to do the first step. But it wasn't the first. The world we discovered had been living within us long since. A human being can lie with his voice, with his words, body and gestures but never with his eyes. So it was our eyes that first approached each other. It was our eyes and their hidden, vivid, lucid language that led us when there was no light to show us the way. The sound of our voices followed them, and when our hearts pronounced the word "hope", it was like the echo of a drum signalling the presence of life from continent to another. All that is long ago.

Time, people say, is a balm that heals every wound. But what they are talking about is indifference, not time. For time cannot undo what happened and there are wounds no time can heal.

I want to share with you, my friends, you who are patient enough to follow the capricious thread of this story, the memory of one day we spent together in Acre.

It was one of those joyful days without any particular significance, from the memory of which we shape our image of what we call the beauty or the lightness of life, for we find a child-like, floating safety in their sweetness.

We spent the evening by the sea, following the course of the waves, listening intently to the twilight language of silence. And the sea was vast and all-comprising, weightless and heavy at once. It was a hot day's evening and the sunset liberated the city. Now it breathed freely, at last. There was the sound of airplanes heading for South Lebanon with the deadly freight of their shells but the impacts of the missiles didn't penetrate into our thoughts. In the solitude of a beach in the evening our love spoke its name, so delicate, tender and frail that no one could destroy it, or anyone.

Longing lay above the city, as Nurit spoke to me.

While he speaks, the stage set is changed into a beach scene after sunset.

Nurit sits and the sand and now Gamal goes to take his position beside her.

Nurit: Let's steal away and leave this place! Let us go out in search of life, if necessary let us flee into innermost Africa, where we will be alone with ourselves. We can't remain here. Not if we want to be who we are. This life will destroy us. It will take everything from us. This is a place where you pay with your life for any moment of true happiness. Why should we pay this price? Let us break out of this, together, and find a place where we can be ourselves, for this Promised Land is a paradise that has been turned into hell. Let us travel together to where we must not be enemies! I don't need the promised land, for my promised land is your love. Let us leave to come home or find a home! Somewhere where we can be free. Let us leave everything behind to find it!

Gamal: As long as I can think back I have been searching for such a place. But the farther I looked, the more it became apparent to me that that place can be nowhere but here.

Nurit: Is this world a maze, then, and all paths in it lead back to the same place over and over, whenever you search for a way out?

Gamal: I have tried everything. I have tried to love and I have tried to hate. I have tried to escape and I have tried to stay where I am. Both is impossible. I've tried deceiving others and I have tried deceiving myself. I said: The missile impacts didn't penetrate into our thoughts. What a lie! Those missile impacts are our thoughts.

Nurit: I know...But hope is human.

Gamal (smiling): Yes. Its journey, however, is not a journey in space. Do you like stories?

Nurit: Perhaps.

Gamal: Let me tell you one, then, and let me know how you like it. It's a story that has been on my mind:

(The illumination is dimmed and focuses Gamal.)

A story about the souls of birds. An old Sufi parable, you know. It tells of the birds who set out on a journey to find Simurgh, the father of all birds, the originator of their souls. Their journey was a long and perilous one and it demanded the sacrifice of everything a bird can sacrifice. Not all of them had in them the strength to pursue it, some gave themselves up and others died on the way. In the end, it was six of them that arrived. Exhausted by suffering and tired to death, but in their hearts a triumph they had never before known, for they had hoped against hope and reached what they sought, they saw the truth there was to see, and it was a mirror that showed them-- six birds, the Persian for which is *si murgh*. That is what they found.

(Full illumination is resumed.)

Nurit: Then the labyrinth is a spiral. And the destinations of our journeys are - we.

Gamal: Yes. It is us we need to find. For wherever we go, what else is there to be found? What else but Palestine could we seek in every place we go to? The whole world is Palestine to us. But it works vice versa too. For the basic questions are the same. No matter where, no matter who. The world is but one world and we need an answer to it.

Nurit leaves the scene and turns to speak to the audience.

Nurit: Yes, that day in Acre. I remember. It was one of our last days together. We tried to create an illusion of carefreeness, in which we almost succeeded, until the evening came and the sunset with all the melancholia of its golden heaviness that saturated the skies with the colour of Jerusalem's dome, and Jerusalem, the epitome of our being,

seized our mood. Jerusalem. There's no second word in the human language like this. We were brought up with a non-compromising, passionate love for that city, which is the deepest essence of our souls. I loved and, yet, I learnt to hate it, for it seemed a prison to our thoughts and our hearts. What is the blessing with which this city has been blessed, I asked God. Is it not one acquired at the price of a curse? Both, our mystics say, are a disguise of one and the same thing. Ha Magid Mesharim and the Shulhan Arukh- both were written by the same hand and are words from the mouth of the same man. The tana'im, who are the corner stones of the law, had among them descendants of 'Amalek's seed, descendants of the enemies saved by King Shaul, who, on their account, lost his kingdom to the herdsman David. White light and dark light, inextricably linked, so much so that the very distinction between them seems nothing but a necessary illusion, driving the chariots of moon and sun, for if the Creator willed this world, no other world is possible. The sight of our eyes, then, is a mere shadow and in order to see, we must see with all we got, all we are, for every day requires a new answer, though the question is old; the same, yet not the same.

As for ourselves, we failed to find it, I admit. But then, "neither is it for us to finish the work nor are we free to abandon it".

For one brief moment we saw and thought things we hadn't seen or thought before.

For one brief moment the silence was broken. Our hearts then decided to speak, and we realised at that moment that it was one step more that had to be gone, one thought further that we had to think- and the fabric of this society between peace and war, between intifada and autonomy, would have cracked open, for a new quality in our consciousness, a new reality, to emerge. Give me a fix-point, Archimedes said, and I shall unhinge the world. We didn't dare to, and thus the old equilibrium was retained, and we were crushed by the weight of its gravity. I -we- left Gamal when he needed us most and when we most needed him.

Voice Over in the background (growing in volume): Mavet la Aravim! Mavet la Aravim! Izhak Rabin Rozeah! Ha 'am 'im ha Golan! Mavet la Aravim! Mavet le Rabin! Barukh Goldstein Gibor!

Nurit: It was the most radical voices that dominated the scene. Kahane, Shass, Gush Emunim. They marched up blocking the traffic and crying for blood. A recent suicide attack had driven things to a head. The city was a powder keg and the nation was ripe for an explosion.

A voice over is conveying the mood. Then a sudden shot rings out.

Nurit: I cannot believe the attack on Rabin came to anyone as a surprise. It was in the air, palpable like an approaching storm. At that time Rosenbaum had facilitated our meetings by putting his apartment at our disposal, meetings that were soon to involve others beside us, for what united Gamal and me had long become more than a personal affair.

The setting turns into:

12th Scene

“DO WE WANT SUCH A WORLD?”

Rosenbaum's apartment. It is a cosy place, compact, arranged with care, reflecting the tastes of a cultured man of Ashkenazi descent.

Nurit, Gamal, Rosenbaum.

Gamal(to Rosenbaum): Why are you doing it?

Rosenbaum: If you don't feel comfortable with what is offered, you need not take it.

Gamal: I will be comfortable once I know the hand offered to me and the man who owns it.

Rosenbaum: The man who owns it is one in whose name millions in compensation have been made payable to the state of Israel, of which he hasn't seen a penny, but which have been used, instead, to finance war, occupation and settlements for which he is tired of serving as a pretext. All right? And his hand is part of an arm that has a blue number tattooed on it.

As unlikely I may be as the one to offer you shelter, as much I am predestined to be the one. You ask me why, my friend? Perhaps there is more than one answer.

Perhaps, as this murderous century draws to an end, I may have an old man's pardonable weakness of wanting to make my peace with it. As far as peace is a state attainable to one whose heart's been skinned alive long before it ever knew spring, to whom the light of the sun forever bears the shadow of death, eyes frozen in the reflection of a reality that by far exceeds the capacity of his nightmares, and who, yet, has discovered that survival does have its attractions, and that it's not a betrayal to feel like this.

(The spotlights focus Rosenbaum. As he speaks his monologue, the heavy, machine-like, haunting noise of the breath of people poisoned by Cyclone B, gasping for air is displayed in varying levels of volume.)

The angel of death has spoken to me with his hand clad in white rubber gloves; a practitioner of the exact sciences, thorough-bred, descended from poets and thinkers. And I, son of ancient deserts and root of his knowledge, born man and overnight turned vermin, East-turned-West-turned vacuum, desert within desert within snowy bleached vastness, am the microbe dissected by this angel-like white hand, which has grown into a universe of its own. How does one answer to one's own scientifically planned systematic destruction? How does one respond to the dialectics of the analytical decomposition into particles of smoke of a life that happens to be one's own? I will tell you: The only thing that can help you preserve an animate soul, a self resistant to the strategies of

decomposition, is an analytical mind. Never close your eyes. Never “hope”. For the only resistance you can offer is seeing reality as what it is. Shed now, like a dead skin, the illusion of civilisation, for it is this that paralyses you. The sheep is a wolf too. Remember that and do not forget! It is a mere question of the distribution of roles. The sheep who knows that, knows its butcher and, knowing its butcher, it knows itself too. He that understands what is happening to him is not broken. By doing so, he acquires a chance and a mission, and a potential to outlive his destruction. And in having obtained this end, he has a new responsibility thrust upon him. Unjustly, perhaps, but life being true to itself, this is how it is. The concentration camp was not a jail but the model of the new world, as its designers, collaborators and willing and unwilling benefactors envisaged it, which is the old world revolutionised by a greater clarity and greater consequence in the implementation of its principles. A world whose scientists are the builders of Auschwitz and Dachau, their grandsons the planners of an Auschwitz and a Dachau of cosmic dimensions. And what else is that world but the society we have known all our lives, reduced to its raw basis and robbed -or freed-of the superstructures that beautify it? What makes it possible is exactly that familiarity, and the terrible complicity between victim and perpetrator. For no one is deeper entrenched in the patterns of the system than its victims. The question we got to answer is: Do we want such a world?

(The background noise stops and the illumination brightens, spotlights now focusing on Gamal and Nurit, whose gestures convey a thoughtful, energetic answer in the negative.)

Under our flag? *(to Gamal)*: Or under yours? Do we want to be victims or perpetrators? Or do we want a world in which we have to be neither? Do we want the world of tomorrow to be another world or do we want tomorrow’s oppression to merely be another oppression? The first step to reclaiming our humanity is to understand that a human being’s humanity can never be lost, for it is, in all its forms and expressions, intrinsic to him. If we -and with us mankind- have survived Auschwitz and Dachau only in order to witness Sabra and Shatila, then our suffering has been without sense. In order to regain our sovereignty, to emancipate ourselves from the dictates of that lethal cycle and be able to make our own choices, to be victorious in the end, we must break free of the structures that perpetuate it. This, habibi, since you are asking me about it, is the reason for my presence in this place. I had the illusion -and there are productive illusions too- that, in resistance to the stream that sought to sweep us away, something new, something different could be achieved-- here, where they tell me I originate from; here, in the land of the old temple and the old struggles, here, where everything began. And, old fool that I am, I have that illusions still. It’s my dilemma. Forgive me.

Gamal: Nothing--- La ya Sidi. It’s not you. It’s not I. We all are being used. Used by those who are the enemies of you and me both, the engineers of your national catastrophe and ours, builders of Auschwitz, Dachau, Sabra and Shatila...

Rosenbaum: Hiroshima...

Nurit: The colonial empires...

Rosenbaum: And the “free market”, boundless in expansion and free of all moral, humane and ethical restraints, thus absolute in jurisdiction, funded with the money they made there and true to the spirit of which history’s atrocities are born.

CURTAIN.

3rd Trance Sequence

“SHOW THEN, AT LAST, YOUR FACE”

Back to the Igbo village.

The scene and setting is the same as in the 1st Trance Sequence and continues where the 1st Trance Sequence has been interrupted. In this sequence, however, Gamal, Nurit, Hefziba, Yemane, Khalida, Aysha, Shadi and Rosenbaum are among the men and women of the village.

Gamal (stepping forward): Show then, at last, your face!

The Mask: Do you believe then that I’m separate from what you have seen?
Do you believe the masks that reflect me
Are different from my face?
Take it then
That I’m naught.
Nothing.
No one.
My power
Lies in this.

Let’s say then
That the human nature
Is what human nature is.
It is corrupt,
For it needs fuel
And it needs fuel
To be corrupt.
I am, let’s say
That fuel.

Gamal: You are feeding us nothing
But a summary of abstractions.
Reality must be concrete,

For it is an expression of truth,
Complex but
Manifest.
Similes merely help to outline it,
The speech that obscures it is not a simile but a lie.
Nothing a human hand works
Is unfathomable to the human mind,
For hand and mind, single and in interrelation,
Are the summary of the human condition.
Hence they are what I am
And I am what they are--
And so are you.
You are Wadd and Yaghout,
Mannat, 'Ouzza and Lat.
You are the meaning that lost itself
And turned mask,
Which covers now
Another meaning.

The Mask(now revealing a new layer of its face, made up of an oversize dollar bill):

Forget about Mannat,
Wadd, Yaghout, 'Ouzza and Lat!
The old gods no longer believe in themselves.
I am the New Age and the New Order.

Gamal: And yet,
You are an idol,
For you don't know yourself.
You have merely abandoned the dogma of tradition
To replace it
With the dogma of the New Age.
Today, as back then,
When knowledge broke free
From the dark,
One word suffices
To smash it.

The Mask (mocking): Which?

Gamal: Iqra!

Aysha steps forward.

Nurit: Read your heart!

Aysha steps forward.

Aysha: Know yourself!

Shadi steps forward.

Shadi: Read!

Rosenbaum: Hear!
God is ONE.
Hand and Mind-
ONE.
The Universe and the World,
Creating FORCE and Creation--
ONE IT IS,
Not two.

Khalida steps forward.

Khalida: Thus, there is no power
To alienate truth from itself,
God from Creation
And man from man's work.

Hefziba steps forward.

Hefziba: If we are one with ourselves,
We are one with our true Self,
One with each other's selves
And truths;
Oneness freed from the veil of delusion,
And thus free of masks,
Unbroken boundless stark light,
In might and depth eternal;
Limitless, pure creation.

Yemans steps forward.

Yemane: In the ancientness of the days I was dust,
Stone, water, plant and animal.
Desiring to know myself,
I travelled form after form
For the road to reflect him that journeyed on it
In his footprints.
And I behold myself
In myself

By myself.
I am that I am.
I am what I shall be.
I am that I was.
I am, for I know myself to be
Thus.

Gamal (to the Mask): And you, o spirit of denial,
Were a path on my road too,
In the days when you had meaning,
When your gnosis, once shadow of light
And now shadow of shadows,
Led me from being to the cognition of being.
And I passed from childhood perfection
To the sore ground of raw youth,
From feudal yokes' animal slavehood
To bourgeois mellow liberty,
In ripe growth,
Profit-driven,
Diving for the pearls of strange seas
And new lands,
In which a new horizon beckons
That stirs with new dawns
And I set sails
For ripe age's true freedom,
Which is self-knowledge
That drinks,
Sagaciously and ageless now,
Of childhood's spring
Once more.

Nurit: You were a step on the way
That led to our emergence.
But we are the way itself
And its goal.
You can see, in all things,
But one aspect of them.
And we are beyond it,
And beyond those that serve it,
For we, seeing in things their self
And its relations,
See everything
In everything.

The Mask thereupon tears the dollar bill off its face and now reveals an aspect made up of Nurit's and Gamal's faces combined into one. Its hand is on the ground.

Rosenbaum: Behold the vision
And the dream!
Nurit and Gamal,
Aspects of the cosmos,
Souls of the Living,
Their day and their moment
A space within time,
Their time a part
Of Time.*

CURTAIN.

**yawmhum u Waqtuhum abadun fid-dhar
dharuhum dharun
min ad-dhar*

13th Scene

“YOUR QUESTIONING IS STILL AHEAD OF YOU”

Rosenbaum's apartment.

Nurit, Shadi, Aysha, Yemane, Rosenbaum and others are seated in the living room.

Nurit: Our parents' souls, like our leaders' minds, are a fortress. What they fear more than anything else is change. They fear it more than they fear assassinations, wars and nightly attacks, more than they fear losing their sons and daughters in the wars. It is for things not to change that they are ready to pay every price.

Shadi: I understand them.

When our fathers came to the places where they have once been children together and when our exiles return to where once they lived, they find nothing in them that resembles their past. They'd expect to find the same houses with the same curtains on their windows and the same furniture in them, and with the old neighbours, unaltered, welcoming them back after having waited for them all their lives. They expect the days of their childhood to have been preserved in them unscathed.

Aysha: Our lives have stopped at a point to which there is no return.

Shadi: The old Palestine is in our heart and should have been a memory to pass on, so it may live and grow together with the new, for the past is not going to return.

Aysha: Perhaps, if things would have grown with us, if changes would have taken place in their own time, if they'd have been gradual, imperceptible steps that are parts of our lives, so natural that they go almost unnoticed, they would have been part of us. And when we'd look at the old photos we'd notice with curiosity how once things have been, and our world would not have lost its cohesion. *(to the Israelis present)* But you have prevented it. Perhaps even because when you came here, you felt the same.

Shadi: Let us not argue time. Let us not argue the questions of absence and presence and what they mean. Let us look at our common history!

Nurit: Let us look at the thousand things that we share; that unite rather than separate us!

Shadi: And at that Golden Age that belongs to us both!

Yemane: Let us look at this generation and at this day! And those to follow it!

Rosenbaum: Let us all understand that there is neither a restitution of the past, nor is there absolute power.

Aysha: Let us all understand that the lives of all of us, who live here, are affected by the same conditions!

Shadi: In order to find an answer to our questions, we must realise three things. The first thing is that the two-states solution is an interim step that cannot, in itself, solve the problem-- for the reasons we have just discussed. Therefore, the second thing is that our hope for co-existence lies in our ability to live not apart but together. A two-states-solution makes sense only if it is the first step toward federation, and that federation is workable neither under the flag of Zionism nor under the concept of an Islamic State. With things as they are, there is no solution to this conflict, and this is the third thing we need to understand: It is not the governments but the people that must act.

The door bell rings.

Rosenbaum goes to open the door.

He returns with Hefziba who, accompanied by Abu Fathi, enters the room wordlessly.

All eyes are glued to them. They are both silent. It is only after a few tense, heavy moments that Hefziba begins to speak.

Hefzibah (introducing Abu Fathi): This is Aysha's father. He asked me to show him the way.

Abu Fathi: I am here on behalf of Gamal.

Another tense, expectant silence.

Abu Fathi: I am here to inform you of his arrest.

Nurit: His arrest...?

The door bell rings again, followed by three energetic knocks at the door.

Voices of the first and second Shin Bet Officer: Sherut Betahon. Open up!

Rosenbaum goes to open the door and returns in the company of two Shin Bet Officers (who are identical with with the 1st and 2nd Brother from Scene 9 and the Military Judge and Jewish Settler from the 2nd Trance Sequence, respectively).

First Shin Bet Officer: Shalom.

Rosenbaum: Shalom.

Some of those respond the greeting, while others merely nod their heads or look on silently.

The officers approach Shadi.

Second Shin Bet Officer: Shadi Al Karmi?

Shadi: Yes.

First Shin Bet Officer (signaling him to follow them): Yalla.

Aysa: Where are you taking him?

Second Shin Bet Officer: Shut up, girl.

First Shin Bet Officer: He will have some questions to answer, my sweet. Never mind the separation. It's only temporary. For we'll come for you too.

Rosenbaum: And here ends our story.

Nurit (to Abu Fathi): Y o u led them here?

Abu Fathi (bitter): Nobody led them here. They need no leading.

First Shin Bet Officer: We've watched this for some time. This is a democratic state, rabotai. The only one in the whole blasted Middle East, for that matter. Everyone is free to say anything as long as they don't act on it. But where you call the established order into question, democracy meets its limits. We know you very well, Gevirti, and we know Gamal Mahdawi. How come that at your age you're not in the military?

Nurit: Because I'm a student.

First Shin Bet Officer: We'll see to that. Your conscription is well on the way, so your fellow student, your dove-eyed Arabian love, be promoted straight from object of your romantic longings to objective of your Uzi. And it's high treason if you don't shoot.

Rosenbaum: You've got no right...-

First Shin Bet Officer (holding his pistol into the spotlights): Our right is this. See if you'll question it.

Second Shin Bet Officer: Don't stage a riot, Adoni. It's just the rules of the game. We play it until it's up. And when it is, it'll be a new one; a different game with different rules. All we do, Adoni, is look out for the pattern. Those people here shouldn't be where they are. A man your age and with your history ought to be a respectable citizen, inviolate and sacrosanct; a serene queen on the chessboard.

First Shin Bet Officer (to the audience): And you too, you'll pay for what you've been up to. Your questioning is still ahead of you.

They leave with Shadi.

EXIT SHIN BET OFFICERS.

Nurit (looking at Abu Fathi): Father...

Abu Fathi (to Aysha): It has come as I told you. *(to Nurit)* And we have won a daughter to share our fate...

Like from a far distance, Nurit collapses into his arms like a child. He looks on astonished, shaking his head. Then he comforts her.

Abu Fathi: As crazy as it sounds, there must be an answer indeed. Do not permit this silence to be the last word!

CURTAIN.

As the curtain falls, we hear Oum Kouloum's "Ana bi intisarak":

***Your Fire remained in my veins
I raised my hand against desire
I waited,
Each moment of your absence,
O would
I had not, ever,
Loved!***

Gamal, now in traditional Palestinian clothing, appears in front of the closed curtain. As the spotlights focus on him, we hear from a distance Nurit's voice reading lines from the song's text.

Gamal then, without stepping forward, speaks into the music the words of the 137th psalm:

If I should forget of thee, o Jerusalem,
May my right hand forsake me,
May my tongue be stuck to my palate
Should I forsake thy remembrance,
Should I not count Jerusalem
The supreme of my joys.

EXIT GAMAL, as the music continues.

This play contains quotations from "Het Achterhuis" (The Diary of Anne Frank) [Second Trance Sequence: "I don't want to have lived for nothing..."etc.],
the Mathnawi (Jalalad-din Balkhi [Rumi]) III, 2655 [9th Scene: "You are acquainted with the ousoul {fundamentals} of the religion..." etc.],
"Ana bi intisarak" (Bairam At-Tounsi, Music by Zakaria Ahmad)
and the Book of Psalms (137th Psalm).

The cases represented in the Second Trance Sequence are based on cases from the legal practice of Mrs. Felicia Langer, which are also quoted in her books ("An Age of Stone" and others).

All translations, except Mathnawi III, 2655, which is based on the English translation by Reynold A. Nicholson (1930)*, are mine.

*Professor Nicholson's original translation reads:

Thou art acquainted with the fundamentals (usúl) of the (Mohammedan) Religion, but look upon thine own fundamental (asl) and see whether it is good.
Thine own fundamentals are better for thee than the two fundamentals (of the Mohammedan Religion), so that thou mayst know thine own fundamental (essential nature), O great man.

("The Mathnawi of Jalaluddin Rumi, Edited from the Oldest Manuscripts Available, Volume III and IV")

Notes for the performance:

The length of the play will necessitate a performance in three parts (unless the narration is broken down to the gist, which is not an easy thing to do while maintaining the scope of the play, but might, nevertheless, be achieved by a skilled director -who knows?-).

The first part would usually end with the 1st Trance Sequence (Exposition) {1st Day}, while the second would commence with Scene 7 and last to the 2nd Trance Sequence (Crisis), with scenes 11 to 13 [including the 3rd Trance Sequence] (catastasis) forming the third (and final) part of the play {2nd Day}.

The monologues could be displayed on a big screen simultaneous with their recitation, which would be an element conducive to highlighting the play's general character as a mixture of documentation and fiction. Some of them, such as Hefziba's monologue, should be accentuated by taqsim (musical improvisations) and sound effects.

The Voice Over preceding the prologue should be played from a tape, the 3rd Shin Bet Officer, who later on will reappear as The Mask, being the only speaker to take part in the play.

I may be useful to state here that all characters are based on existing persons (some, of course, being summaries of a number of such persons) and that the events depicted are based on historical events. I will admit freely that I have never been a writer with much fantasy. Therefore my imagination has always had to restrict itself to describing the life I have known.

"Nurit" is a play that has been with me since 1995, a circumstance for which I am very grateful, as it has helped me never to cease living in the old homeland, which I haven't seen in 15 years. The "disappearance" of my personal documents, among which there were many important manuscripts, a few years ago forced me to reconstruct this play on the basis of a skeleton with the plan of the scenes and the motifs of the dialogues (and monologues) -a surviving draft of a notoriously bad quality dictated to an improvised secretary with a rather imperfect command of the English language-, a fact which, however, has contributed to "Nurit"'s being my faithful companion throughout the past 16 years. And I presume it will not depart from my mind, nor ever descend into the realm of manuscripts sealed, for as long as I live, for this play is a cornerstone of my soul. My past and my future are in it.

Regardless whether my foot shall ever again touch the earth of Jerusalem (which I shall not cease to hope, for if I did, I should cease to exist), I am putting all my heart into the prayer that the realisations and the vision expressed here will gain ground once more and, in the end, determine the awareness, the politics and the future of Palestine.

I am well aware of the final lines of the 137th psalm. We can't spare ourselves the bitterness of those words if we are to approach an understanding of each other's identity and psyche, which, in all its painfulness and far reaching consequences, is tantamount to reaching a true and comprehensive peace based -by political and historical necessity- on true and comprehensive justice. A viable solution to the Middle East conflict can be achieved only on the basis of our re-cognition of each other and on each other's re-appreciation as, in the words of our elders, two fingers of one hand. Our hope, our future, our identity -and I'm referring to Palestinians and Israelis alike, rest on this foundation. And so do mine.

Peace and justice are the only solution. Yes to the unity of the peoples. No to oppression and war!